

Heirs of God
Romans 8:12-17

Have you ever wanted to live in the lap of luxury? Well, let me tell you the story of a man who was given the opportunity to live in the lap of luxury. He was a well-educated man with a young family. His company down-sized, and because he was the newer members of the management staff, they decided to let him go. He immediately went to work looking for a new job. He heard of a very wealthy man who was looking for a personal assistant. He applied for the position. At his interview, the wealthy man was very impressed with him. He offered him the position. The young man asked about salary and benefits. The employer told him that he would provide for all his and his family's needs and give them some spending money. The young man had some concerns about that arrangement, but decided that since he didn't have any other options, he would take it.

His employer turned out to be a man of his word. The young man needed a house, and his boss put him in a palatial house. He needed clothes, and his boss sent him to his personal tailor. The boss gave him a luxury sedan to drive. He put the man's children in a private school. When the young man asked for time off for a vacation, his boss arranged for a travel agent to take him and his family on a two-week tour of Paris.

After a few years of this, the young man left the position. When he was asked why, he said, "My boss was unbelievably kind and generous. But I was not allowed to make any decisions for myself and my family. I was losing my self-respect. In fact, I was losing myself. I had to leave that position to save myself."

I suspect that most of us would have done the same thing. It sounds nice to be taken care of in such a generous fashion. But there was a time when that was exactly what we had, and most of us could hardly wait to be free of it. It's called childhood. We have a God-given need that drives us. In order to have self-respect we need to become mature adults. We want to have the freedom to make decisions about our own lives. We want to take responsibility for ourselves.

That's why we who live in free societies are so much happier than people who don't. When you take freedom away from healthy adults, no matter how well you provide for them, you destroy their souls.

Yet, that is exactly how most people picture God. If you ask people to describe what God is like, most would talk about a fearsome yet kindly king, a benevolent dictator, who rules the world and our lives, making all the decisions for us, reducing us to the status of children.

But there is another picture of God in the Bible. God is presented as the Trinity. God is not one supreme being making decisions unilaterally. God is three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, perfectly united in love, harmony and purpose.

God is not one person sitting at the top of the chain of command micromanaging all events, without consulting anyone. God is three persons working together, talking with one another, discussing possibilities and coming to decisions they agree on.

God even includes us in the decision-making. Did you know that there are several stories in the Bible in which people change God's mind? The best known is the 32nd chapter of Exodus. You know the story. Moses has been on Mt. Sinai learning the Law from God and receiving the

tablets on which the Ten Commandments have been written. Suddenly the Lord tells Moses that the Hebrews, who are camped around Mt. Sinai are worshipping an idol, a Golden Calf, which Moses' brother Aaron had made for them. The Lord tells Moses that The Lord has decided to destroy the people with fire and to create a new nation out of Moses' descendants. But Moses reminds God that these people are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to whom God had given the promise of many descendants. Technically speaking, Moses' descendants would also be descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So the plan to destroy the Hebrews and create a new nation out of Moses would have fulfilled the promise to the patriarchs. But Moses could not bear to see the Hebrews destroyed, so he begged God to be faithful to the promise by saving them. In verse 14 it says that God changed his mind.

As I say, this is one of several stories in which people talk God into changing God's mind.

But we also change God's mind every time we pray. Let me ask you something: Why pray if God has already decided in advance what God will do? In fact, every time we go to God in prayer to ask God to do something, we are influencing God.

God has given us far more say in what happens than many people realize. Those who think of God as one almighty person who has decided in advance everything that will happen and controls everything think that people are just puppets, with no influence and no responsibility for what happens.

When we understand God as the Trinity working together cooperatively, we understand that God is also working cooperatively with us.

That's why God hasn't finished created the world. The Kingdom of God has not yet come in all its fullness. We've got a long way to go. So, why has God left this creation unfinished? Because God wanted to include us in the creating of the Kingdom.

God has not decided ahead of time what the world will be like when the Kingdom comes in all its fullness and creation is completed. God has given us the freedom to affect that final creation.

When my children were small, they took art lessons from a teacher who specialized in teaching art to small children. After they had been taking the lessons for some weeks, they brought some of their pictures home. Now, my daughter is a naturally gifted artist. So, I wasn't surprised by the quality of her picture. My son, on the other hand, sees life in straight lines and right angles, which doesn't make for great art. However, he had painted a picture of a chipmunk which was not only recognizable, but cute. I was amazed, and I was bragging on him. He said, "Well, dad, I did have a little help." When I looked a little closer, I could see it. The teacher hadn't done much. Most of the work was my son's. But she used a line here and a bit of color there, and the little she did pulled my son's work together and made a nice picture out of it.

That's what God is doing with us. We are building the Kingdom. God is doing as little as possible. God wants it to be our work. But God puts a line here and a bit of color there to bring it all together. We are co-creators.

No one knows what the finished work will look like. But we can be certain of this. When the Kingdom is completed, it will look a lot like God. This will be a world in which people are perfectly united in love, harmony and purpose.

Paul tells us that those who are led by the Spirit are children of God. Actually, we are all children of God when we come into the world, but some are like the Prodigal Son, who decided not to be his father's child. God has given us the freedom to reject our place in the family of

God. We can choose to be Children of the Devil. But, those who choose to be led by the Spirit are children of God.

If we choose to be led by the Spirit, then we are children of God and heirs of God. We will inherit the treasures of God.

The question is, what are the treasures we inherit from God?

The most important thing we inherit from our parents is not what they have. It is who they are. Our parents shape us. They shape us through the genetically, of course. Just as important, they shape us by their example. They show us how to live and act.

That is certainly true of God. We were created in the image of God. That means we have been given many of God's qualities. But, just as important, we will follow God's example. We will act the way we think God acts.

If you think that God is an all-powerful dictator or a king, you will want to have as much power as possible. You will want to be in control. As religious people, you will want to have power in the name of God and for the glory of God to fulfill God's will. You will want to take care of people in the name of God. You will say to them, "I know what is best for you. Just trust me and do what I tell you to do and you will have a better life." But it doesn't work. You don't help people when you take away their freedom and dignity, their opportunity to be mature adults.

If we understand God as the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, creating cooperatively, we will inherit the Kingdom of God, a society in which people live together in peace and harmony, listening to one another, making decisions together, treating each other with dignity and respect. We will act like God and become the kind of person who fits into the Kingdom. That is the kind of person we will become. That will be our inheritance. We will not only inherit what God has. More importantly, we will inherit who God is. The children of God will become like God.

If you are led by the Spirit, you are a child of God and a joint heir with Christ. Let the Spirit teach you how to be united in love, harmony and purpose, following the example of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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