

WHY ARE CHRISTIANS CALLED INHERITORS?

Consult any good biblical concordance and look up the words inherit, inheritance, heritage, heir, and heirs, and see how many times these terms are ascribed to Christians. It soon becomes plain that God considers His children as His heirs and heiresses. Why is that? What circumstances could possibly take place to allow you and I to become heirs of the wealthiest Being in the universe?

The apostle Paul explains,

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God...You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ...” (Rom. 8:14-17; Gal. 4:6,7).

Christians receive the gift of the Holy Spirit through faith in God and repentance from their sins. We then become the “sons of God...born...of God” (Jn. 1:12,13), becoming “partakers of the divine nature” of God (II Pet. 1:4). Since Jesus was the “only begotten of the Father” (Jn. 1:14), God must adopt us as His very children by which we become the Father’s—our Papa’s—heirs along with Christ.

An inheritance usually results from a person’s last will and testament. This is a legal document that expresses a person’s (testator) wishes as to how their property (estate) is to be distributed following their death. It has at times been thought that “will” applied to real property, while “testament” applied to personal property, though historical records show that both terms have been used interchangeably. “Will and testament” is actually a legal doublet like “breaking and entering” and “peace and quiet,” and which has its origin in English law.

So what does this legal jargon have to do with Christian inheritance? Let’s begin to understand. Long ago men decided to label the books written by the Hebrew prophets “Old Testament,” and the books and letters written by the apostles “New Testament.” Unfortunately, these titles are unhelpful because they are misleading, at least to those who only speak English. The Latin translation of the Bible substituted the Greek word for **covenant** with *testamentum*, and in turn the English with testament. So the key word here is covenant.

And indeed, the Bible does refer to a “first [old] covenant” and a “new covenant” (Heb. 8:6-13; Jer. 31:31-34). A covenant is a somewhat archaic term which simply means a formal agreement between two or more parties. Hebrews and Jeremiah tell us what the first covenant was: an agreement between God and ancient Israel (Ex. 19:3-8). Now there are many types of agreements into which parties enter, so which type was this? We are told plainly that it was a marriage covenant. But sadly, Israel was unfaithful and committed spiritual adultery with other gods (Jer. 3:1-14; Ezek. 16). Finally, God divorced his wife, and that is why the covenant between them is old, long over and done!

What of the new covenant, what type is it? Here is where the word testament takes on relevance, because the new covenant could be titled: God’s last will and testament. This covenant is between God and Christians—the **New** Israel—and is all about God’s will and our inheritance. And it is an infinitely “better covenant” (Heb. 7:22; 8:6).

Let’s now read a rather difficult passage and try to come to an understanding of it,

“...How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? For this reason he is the mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives” (Heb. 9:14-17).

It is important to note that the translators understood that the “new covenant” was in the form of a will, a “testament,” since in this passage the same Greek word is used for both. What makes this passage difficult to understand is the different roles of Christ in our inheritance. Perhaps it will help by quoting Paul, who wrote, “Christ is **all** and in all” (Col. 3:11). He is everything!

Christ is God in the flesh, who shed his blood for our redemption from sin. He is the mediator of the new covenant because it is administered and applied through him. He is the testator who had to die in order for the testament to take effect, thus fulfilling the role of the Father. He is the Son and joint-heir with God’s adopted children. Perhaps this is why he is given so many names in Isaiah 9:6. Here we see Christ is a son, counselor, God, and father. He was the LORD, YHWH, and the I AM of ancient Israel. Indeed, “Christ is all”!

So just what is the Christian inheritance? If you have ever been about to receive an inheritance, you know there is much excitement and anticipation. “What and/or how much am I going to get?” It may come as a disappointment to learn that although the Bible says much about how and why Christians are God’s heirs, it says little or nothing about specifically **what** it will be. Why is that? It is really pretty simple actually. How can we who live only in a physical realm understand and perceive the spiritual world wherein lays our inheritance? How can we who can only appreciate physical wealth comprehend spiritual heavenly riches?

Long ago God gave each tribe of Israel an inheritance of land in Canaan except for the tribe of Levi, which was to act as priests for the others. The reason given was because, “The LORD is their inheritance” (Deut. 18:1,2). The priests did not get any land, but they got something far better. They got God? They got the tithes of the people and the best of their livestock and produce. They were the richest tribe. We are told the Christian nation is a “holy priesthood” (I Pet. 2:5), and our inheritance, like Levi, is God. That is why Asaph could write, “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside you. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Psa. 73:25,26).

God says, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7). And remember, we are joint-heirs with Christ, who is “appointed heir of all things” (Heb. 1:2). Our inheritance is described as blessings, promises, the kingdom of God, eternal life. It is eternal, imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, and is reserved for us. It will be impossible to squander our inheritance since it will never run out.

Let’s consider one other very important aspect of our inheritance. Just like some parents may release some portions of their children’s inheritance while they are still living, so has God. He has already given us His love, mercy, and kindness. He has shown us His will, and given us a portion of His wisdom. He already fills our lives with blessings. Paul wrote, “The Holy Spirit is the down payment on our inheritance...” (Eph. 1:14; *CEB*). By the Spirit we have spiritual gifts to serve others, and we have the fruits of the Spirit of love, joy, peace and the others. The Spirit gives us comfort, peace, and

judgment. One could go on and on, but as we look to and long for our eternal inheritance, let's use wisely the portion that God has already given us.