

Two Inheritances

For years I misread [Romans 8:16-17](#). In my defense, I never heard it preached or taught correctly, that I can remember. But, to my shame, I fell into a trap—and the trap is making assumptions about Scripture passages rather than honestly interpreting the passages, even if the interpretation doesn't fit our theological grid.

I personally believe that is a major problem in Bible-believing Christianity—assuming, based on what we have been taught or always known. But what if our teachers were incorrect on a particular point? Are we obligated to perpetuate an erroneous tradition? God forbid! I appreciate my teachers, and learned much from them, but I am now convinced they missed some things, and I'm sure I have too—no one of us has all the answers. That is why having a teachable spirit is so critical.

Putting aside preconceived notions, let's approach this Scripture passage with an open mind.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together ([Romans 8:16-17](#)).

I always assumed all believers become both heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ at the point of salvation, as if there were a period at the end of that statement. However, I have since realized that, according to the verse, inheritance with Christ is conditional—**“if** so be that we suffer with him.” Somehow, I had missed that.

The point I desire to make in this article is that in the Bible, we find not **one** inheritance for Christians, but **two**. The first is an unconditional inheritance. It is guaranteed and bestowed on all saints based on our *position* in Christ—the inheritance is eternal life, because we are sons of God and, as sons, heirs of God.

Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ ([Galatians 4:7](#)).

The other inheritance is conditional. It is not guaranteed, but is awarded at the Judgment Seat only to those who qualify, based on faithfulness and perhaps other factors (i.e., how one progresses in sanctification). The inheritance is the privilege of ruling with Christ in the millennium as a co-heir with Christ. Notice the following chart:

Unconditional Inheritance	Conditional Inheritance
Guaranteed	Not guaranteed

Bestowed on all saints	Awarded to qualified saints
Based on position in Christ— “Heirs of God”	Based on faithfulness— “co-heirs with Christ”
Inheritance = Eternal Life	Inheritance = ruling with Christ in the Millennium

Our unconditional inheritance can never be forfeited, for it is based on sonship. However, our conditional inheritance can be forfeited, for it is based on qualifying as a firstborn son.

In Bible times, firstborn sons received a double portion. Nevertheless, while it was referred to commonly as the inheritance of the firstborn, the father was under no obligation to give it to the firstborn. He could choose to give it to another, if he did not deem the firstborn son worthy of the firstborn inheritance. In other words, if a firstborn son disqualified himself for one reason or another, he would lose the special inheritance for firstborn sons.

A classic example of this is Jacob and his firstborn son. Reuben was the firstborn son and normally would have received the double inheritance, but Reuben disqualified himself by taking his father’s concubine as his own. Thus, Jacob pronounced Reuben unworthy of receiving the double inheritance and, instead, gave it to Joseph, blessing Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Reuben still received the unconditional inheritance guaranteed to all sons, but he did not receive the conditional firstborn inheritance. That was given to another who was declared worthy.

God reminds New Testament Christians that *“all these things happened unto them [Old Testament Israel] for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor. 10:11)*. In other words, what happened to Old Testament Israel is to serve as a spiritual example to us, so that we might learn and not repeat the mistakes of Israel.

Consider the Exodus. How many of the Israelites—at the point of the Exodus, when they left Egypt—were saved people? Every one of them! How do we know this? They *all* believed God, and they *all* applied the blood to the doorposts, as God had said. The angel of death passed over *all* of them, and they were *all* delivered from bondage in Egypt. Of course, the Passover is a beautiful picture of salvation in Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Thus, we sing that wonderful hymn, “When I see the blood, I will pass, I will pass over you.”

Knowing the entire nation of Israel was saved at the Exodus, what does God have to say about their inheritance? First, they received an unconditional, guaranteed inheritance. Jehovah God declared Himself to be the God of Israel. Their inheritance was Jehovah.

And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the Lord their God (Exodus 29:45-46).

God says this long before Israel takes possession of Canaan land. His unconditional promise (their unconditional inheritance) is that He will be their God. Obviously, individuals born after the Exodus would have to decide whether to believe on God and thereby enter into the national promise. In like manner, individuals today need to make their own decision to depend on Christ alone for salvation and thereby enter into the unconditional inheritance of eternal life that He gives to all who believe.

What was their conditional inheritance? Israel could take possession of the land only if they would obey God and depend on Him for victory over the enemy.

For if ye shall diligently keep all these commandments which I command you, to do them, to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, and to cleave unto him; Then will the Lord drive out all these nations from before you, and...every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours ([Deut. 11:22-24](#)).

The condition for inheriting (i.e., taking possession) of the land was obedience to God's Word and faithfulness (i.e., full dependence on the Lord for victory). Here's the point: saved Israelites unconditionally received God as their inheritance, but possession of Canaan land was conditional, depending on their obedience and faithfulness to Jehovah.

Reformed theologians make the mistake of equating Canaan land with heaven, but that is a hermeneutical error in my opinion. We believe Canaan land is a picture of two things: (1) spiritual victory in the present life, which leads to (2) inheriting Millennial rest in the life to come. Incidentally, even after taking possession of Canaan land the Israelites had the potential of losing it, if they became unfaithful—see [Deut. 28:58](#), [63](#).

As children of God, we are guaranteed eternal life; it is our inheritance as heirs of God. However, we are not guaranteed millennial inheritance; that is the reward for faithfulness. All believers will be in the millennial world, but not all will inherit that kingdom or enjoy the benefits of ruling and reigning with Christ.

I liken that condition to being a subject in a medieval kingdom, for example. The king would own and rule a vast territory. His subjects would benefit from living in the village, under the king's protection and bounty, but only those heirs living in the castle would be able to fully participate in reigning and enjoy the beauties and luxuries and opportunities of the king Himself.

There is a difference between merely living in the millennium and possessing it, just as there was a difference for Israel living in the promised land and possessing it (see [Deut. 11:31](#)). Abraham sojourned in Canaan land, but He did not possess it, according to [Heb. 11:9](#), [13](#). Furthermore, for many centuries of Israel's existence in the land, they did not possess the land, even though they lived there. Instead, foreign powers controlled the land and taxed the Israelites.

Incidentally, from my understanding of Scripture, possession of the promised land was God's gift to Israel from the very beginning of the nation's salvation. In other words, at the time of the Passover, I believe God granted the conditional inheritance to His people. For God refers to Israel not only as His son (unconditional inheritance) but also as His first-born son (conditional inheritance)—read [Ex. 4:22-23](#).

This is also conceptually true for the New Testament Christian. God assumes from the point of salvation His children are not only sons—due an inheritance—but first-born sons—due a double inheritance.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren ([Romans 8:29](#)).

However (and this is a big however), just as the disobedient Israelites disqualified themselves and were disinherited from possessing the promised land, so disobedient Christians whom Jesus deems unworthy are disinherited from taking possession of the millennial kingdom. They lose their status as first-born sons. Paul warns of this possibility in three of his epistles: [1 Cor. 6:9-10](#); [Eph. 5:3-5](#); and [Gal. 5:19-21](#). It seems to me God also uses Esau in Hebrews 12 as a warning to Christians to beware losing their inheritance. The loss of inheritance is not to be equated with the loss of salvation, for that is unconditional, but with the loss of millennial privilege, for that is conditional.

Now the warning of [1 Cor. 10:12](#) makes sense: "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Israel's unbelief and repeated testing of God in the wilderness resulted in disinheritance. Even Moses disqualified himself because of disobedience! If this could happen to Moses, how much more should Christians beware?

[Inheriting the Kingdom of God](#)

The apostle Paul, in writing to the church at Thessalonica, speaks of *the righteous judgment of God*, and being *counted worthy of the kingdom of God* ([2 Thess. 1:5](#)). Why does he use such terminology? How can one be *counted worthy* of the kingdom of God? Is Paul teaching works-salvation?

Of course not! Paul is not speaking about matters of salvation. He is speaking to saints about sanctification, particularly, the culmination of it — meeting Jesus at the Judgment Seat. On that day, the works of all who are in Christ will be tried by fire, to determine *what sort it is* ([1 Cor. 3:13](#)). If one's work abides (being of the gold-silver-precious stones type), a reward will be given. On the contrary, if one's work is burned (being of the

wood-hay-stubble type), all will be lost, yet the individual will be saved eternally.

What is the reward? What is lost or forfeited? While the rewards and losses are much more complex than described in this article, I believe the primary question at hand is whether or not a born-again believer qualifies to inherit the kingdom of God. There is obviously much at stake. Consider the following Scripture passages.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. ([1 Cor. 6:9-10](#))

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. ([Gal. 5:19-21](#))

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ([Eph. 5:3-5](#))

I believe these verses are typically misinterpreted. Those who lean toward Arminian theology say that Paul is warning believers they will lose their salvation if they persist in grievous sins, particularly sins like those listed. This view must be rejected on the preponderance of Scriptural evidence to the contrary. Believers are eternally secure.

Another common misconception is held by Calvinist-leaning theologians, who claim those who persist in these sins demonstrate that they were never saved in the first place. This view is based on the Calvinist tenet that insists true believers will persevere (i.e., behave) as saints throughout the Christian life.

But Paul does not assume these folks are unsaved. He assumes they are saints who have continued in sin. For example, in the Ephesians passage, he says, *let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints*, clearly recognizing the possibility that this kind of sinful behavior can persist in the lives of genuine Christians, even if it is not appropriate. His purpose, therefore, is to issue a stiff warning: if you persist in this kind of behavior, you will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Many have been taught that inheriting the kingdom of God is the Scriptural

equivalent to inheriting eternal life, but it is not particularly how Paul uses the term. In the context of these Pauline passages the phrase *kingdom of God* does not merely denote the eternal realm of God. It makes no sense to admonish believers to be counted worthy of the kingdom or to live in such a way so as to not forfeit the kingdom, if by *kingdom of God* he means eternal life. Paul is not off on the doctrines of justification or eternal security. (I say that tongue-in-cheek).

No, Paul uses the phrase the *kingdom of God* in an eschatological sense, to refer to the millennial reign of Christ. Thus, at stake is whether believers who persist in unrighteousness will inherit the millennial reign of Christ. Ray Baughman, makes this point emphatically in his book, *The Kingdom of God Visualized* (Moody, 1972, p.140). Commenting on the Galatians passage, he says, "This does not refer to eternal life but to any place of responsibility in Christ's kingdom. He is speaking of a habitual way of life rather than individual acts of sin."

Thus, Paul's clear warning is that believers who persist in certain sins will not inherit the millennial kingdom. (Incidentally, the list of sins is not exhaustive, for Paul adds the disclaimer, *and such like*, leaving the list open).

The key word here is *inherit*. Thayer gives three definitions for this word that are especially helpful.

1. to receive a lot, receive by lot
2. to receive the portion assigned to one, receive an allotted portion, receive as one's own or as a possession
3. to become partaker of, to obtain

For Paul to teach that persistently sinning Christians will not inherit the millennial kingdom is not the same as saying they will not be in the millennial world. To illustrate this point, think of what Jesus said in the Beatitudes, *Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth* ([Matt. 5:5](#)). We are all physically present on earth, yet only the meek *inherit* the earth. That is, they receive it as their allotted portion, given to them by God as an inheritance. Others do not share in that blessing.

Presumably, the same is true with respect to the millennium. All believers will be physically present in that world but apparently not all will become partakers of (or participants in) Christ's millennial kingdom. They will not inherit it. No doubt, that will result in missed opportunities, shamefulness, and much sorrow. Theologians differ as to the details, but what is clear from the Scriptures is that the millennium will not be experienced in the same way by all believers.

Perhaps that is one of the reasons why, at the conclusion of the millennium ([Rev. 21:4](#)), God will wipe away all tears from the eyes of His saints prior to their entrance into heaven. Why will there be tears during the millennium, a great time of joy on earth? Understandably, many Christians will be agonizing and weeping over the fact that they persisted in sins throughout their pre-millennial earthly existence. They did not appropriate the

provision of Christ for living a victorious life.

The writer to the Hebrews, like Paul, also seems to warn his audience of the dire consequences of persisting in sin, reminding that *our God is a consuming fire* ([Heb. 12:29](#)). He also uses a haunting illustration to convince his audience. In Hebrews 3 he tells of the Exodus generation – who, although they were saved people, having been redeemed at the first Passover! – chose to test God repeatedly in the wilderness due to their wicked heart of unbelief.

As a result, God swore (declared an oath) that He would not let them enter into the promised land, the land of God's rest. The promised land is not a type of heaven. It is a type of entering the realm of spiritual victory and, ultimately, the millennial rest of Christ. Nevertheless, a whole generation of wayward believers were not allowed entrance into promised rest, including Moses and Aaron! The passage ends with a strong admonition and reminder:

Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. ([Heb. 3:13](#))

In the context, being made a partaker of Christ is being a participant in His millennial kingdom. Oh, may we seek the Spirit's enablement for getting victory over sin!

Millennial Security?

The doctrines of eternal security and dispensational eschatology – both of which I believe are biblically correct – have been misapplied by some, leading to a serious doctrinal error involving the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Millennium. Many who teach these doctrines have unwittingly (“I’ve never heard that before”) or naively (“I’ve always been taught something different”) or worse yet, deliberately (“I don’t believe that”), lessened the severity of the Judgment Seat, on the mistaken basis that all believers are eternally secure overcomers and, as such, will rule and reign with Jesus in the Millennium. Some will be rewarded more and some less, they claim, but all believers will inherit that world to come.

Eternally secure? Yes. We would certainly agree. Overcomers who will inherit the millennial kingdom? Not necessarily. That is not guaranteed to all believers. While all believers will be present in the millennial world, they will not all be inheritors. Inheritors are those who are granted the privileges of first-born sons, based on their submission to the King. The Judgment Seat will determine who inherits and who does not.

The doctrinal error, as I see it, is ignoring God's plan for the glorious millennial age, by superimposing the benefits of eternity – no tears, no sorrow (guaranteed for all believers in eternity) – backwards onto millennial life (not guaranteed for all believers in the millennium). I call this fallacious doctrine "millennial security" – a teaching that is widely accepted but not biblical.

In a nutshell, "millennial security" is the belief that God's children are all guaranteed a millennial existence on par with heavenly existence, including heavenly bliss, with the only differences being place and time. Unfortunately, that is not biblical. Ironically, how you live your life of seventy years (give or take) on earth here and now will determine how you live your thousand-year existence in the millennial world. The consequences are sobering: either reward and ruling or suffering loss and regretting. The former truly inherits the millennium; the latter merely exists in that world, and the existence will not be joyous. This truth is clearly illustrated in the parable of the pounds, [Luke 19:11-27](#).

When will God wipe away all tears from their eyes? According to [Rev. 21:4](#), it is *after* the millennium, after the first heaven and earth pass away (end of the earthly kingdom), and are replaced with a new heaven and new earth (start of the heavenly kingdom). God does not wipe away all tears immediately following the Judgment Seat of Christ, as many have suggested. No, the Scriptures seem to teach instead that many believers will consciously regret throughout their millennial existence that they did not "hate" or "lose" their soul in this life in order to "find" and "keep" it in the millennial world to come (as determined at the Judgment Seat).

Eternal security is contingent on justification, the legal righteousness of Christ. However, millennial inheritance is contingent on sanctification, the extent to which believers cooperate with God in this life. "Millennial security" is not a biblical doctrine. It is man-made.

Interestingly, inheritors do not all receive the same inheritance. The degrees of glory will be different for every inheritor. Paul makes this point beautifully in [1 Cor. 15:41-42](#):

"There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead."

Oh, that we would live with the longing desire to be His brightest stars!

If this has challenged your thinking, I encourage you to search the Scriptures to see if these things are so.