

# The Inheritance

by George MacDonald

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*The inheritance of the saints is the share each has in the Light, which is God himself, and it is the source of joy, love, and eternal life.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14, John 1:4, John 8:12, Romans 13:12, Ephesians 5:8, Colossians 1:12, James 1:17, 1 Peter 2:9, 1 John 1:5, 1 John 1:7

**Topics:** "Heavenly Inheritance", "Unity With God"

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## Description

George MacDonald preaches about the inheritance of the saints in light, emphasizing that in this heavenly inheritance, each individual's share adds to the richness of others, unlike earthly inheritances where sharing diminishes. He delves into the concept that the very substance of the saints' inheritance is the light, symbolizing God Himself, and the ultimate goal is to be in complete unity with God. MacDonald highlights the importance of selfless sharing and giving in the heavenly kingdom, where true joy and love come from being able to give away what one possesses. He paints a vivid picture of heaven as a place of continuous communion with God, where every thought and action is in harmony with the divine will, and where atonement, reconciliation, and ever-growing love abound.

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## Transcript

Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.--Ep. to the Colossians i. 12.

To have a share in any earthly inheritance, is to diminish the share of the other inheritors. In the inheritance of the saints, that which each has, goes to increase the possession of the rest. Hear what Dante puts in the mouth of his guide, as they pass through Purgatory:--

Perche s' appuntano i vostri desiri

Dove per compagnia parte si scema,

Invidia muove il mantaco a' sospiri.

Ma se l' amor della spera suprema

Torcesse 'n suso 'l desiderio vostro,

Non vi sarebbe al petto quella tema;  
Che per quanto si dice piu li nostro,  
Tanto possiede piu di ben ciascuno,  
E piu di caritade arde in quel chiostro.  
Because you point and fix your longing eyes  
On things where sharing lessens every share,  
The human bellows heave with envious sighs.  
But if the loftiest love that dwelleth there  
Up to the heaven of heavens your longing turn,  
Then from your heart will pass this fearing care:  
The oftener there the word our they discern,  
The more of good doth everyone possess,  
The more of love doth in that cloister burn.

Dante desires to know how it can be that a distributed good should make the receivers the richer the more of them there are; and Virgil answers--

Perocche tu rificchi  
La mente pure alle cose terrene,  
Di vera luce tenebre dispicchi.  
Quello 'nfinite ed ineffabil bene,  
Che lassu e, cosi corre ad amore,  
Com' a lucido corpo raggio viene.  
Tanto si da, quanto trova d' ardore:  
Si che quantunque carita si stende,  
Cresce sovr' essa l' eterno valore.  
E quanta gente piu lassu s' intende,  
Piu v' e da bene amare, e piu vi s' ama,  
E come specchio, l' uno all' altro rende.  
Because thy mind doth stick

To earthly things, and on them only brood,  
From the true light thou dost but darkness pick.  
That same ineffable and infinite Good,  
Which dwells up there, to Love doth run as fleet  
As sunrays to bright things, for sisterhood.  
It gives itself proportionate to the heat:  
So that, wherever Love doth spread its reign,  
The growing wealth of God makes that its seat.  
And the more people that up thither strain,  
The more there are to love, the more they love,  
And like a mirror each doth give and gain.

In this inheritance then a man may desire and endeavour to obtain his share without selfish prejudice to others; nay, to fail of our share in it, would be to deprive others of a portion of theirs. Let us look a little nearer, and see in what the inheritance of the saints consists.

It might perhaps be to commit some small logical violence on the terms of the passage to say that 'the inheritance of the saints in light' must mean purely and only 'the possession of light which is the inheritance of the saints.' At the same time the phrase is literally 'the inheritance of the saints in the light;' and this perhaps makes it the more likely that, as I take it, Paul had in his mind the light as itself the inheritance of the saints--that he held the very substance of the inheritance to be the light. And if we remember that God is light; also that the highest prayer of the Lord for his friends was that they might be one in him and his father; and recall what the apostle said to the Ephesians, that 'in him we live and move and have our being,' we may be prepared to agree that, although he may not mean to include all possible phases of the inheritance of the saints in the one word light, as I think he does, yet the idea is perfectly consistent with his teaching. For the one only thing to make existence a good, the one thing to make it worth having, is just that there should be no film of separation between our life and the life of which ours is an outcome; that we should not only know that God is our life, but be aware, in some grand consciousness beyond anything imagination can present to us, of the presence of the making God, in the very process of continuing us the live things he has made us. This is only another way of saying that the very inheritance upon which, as the twice-born sons of our father, we have a claim--which claim his sole desire for us is that we should, so to say, enforce--that this inheritance is simply the light, God himself, the Light. If you think of ten thousand things that are good and worth having, what is it that makes them good or worth having but the God in them? That the loveliness of the world has its origin in the making will of God, would not content me; I say, the very loveliness of it is the loveliness of God, for its loveliness is his own lovely thought, and must be a revelation of that which dwells and moves in himself. Nor is this all: my interest in its loveliness would vanish, I should feel that the soul was out of it, if you could persuade me that God had ceased to care for the daisy, and now cared for something else instead. The faces of some flowers lead me back to the heart of God; and, as his child, I hope I feel, in my lowly degree, what he felt when,

brooding over them, he said, 'They are good;' that is, 'They are what I mean.'

The thing I am reasoning toward is this: that, if everything were thus seen in its derivation from God, then the inheritance of the saints, whatever the form of their possession, would be seen to be light. All things are God's, not as being in his power--that of course--but as coming from him. The darkness itself becomes light around him when we think that verily he hath created the darkness, for there could have been no darkness but for the light. Without God there would not even have been nothing; there would not have existed the idea of nothing, any more than any reality of nothing, but that he exists and called something into being.

Nothingness owes its very name and nature to the being and reality of God. There is no word to represent that which is not God, no word for the where without God in it; for it is not, could not be. So I think we may say that the inheritance of the saints is the share each has in the Light.

But how can any share exist where all is open?

The true share, in the heavenly kingdom throughout, is not what you have to keep, but what you have to give away. The thing that is mine is the thing I have with the power to give it. The thing I have no power to give a share in, is nowise mine; the thing I cannot share with everyone, cannot be essentially my own. The cry of the thousand splendours which Dante, in the fifth canto of the 'Paradiso,' tells us he saw gliding toward them in the planet Mercury, was--

Ecco chi crescerà li nostri amori!

Lo, here comes one who will increase our loves!

All the light is ours. God is all ours. Even that in God which we cannot understand is ours. If there were anything in God that was not ours, then God would not be one God. I do not say we must, or can ever know all in God; not throughout eternity shall we ever comprehend God, but he is our father, and must think of us with every part of him--so to speak in our poor speech; he must know us, and that in himself which we cannot know, with the same thought, for he is one. We and that which we do not or cannot know, come together in his thought. And this helps us to see how, claiming all things, we have yet shares. For the infinitude of God can only begin and only go on to be revealed, through his infinitely differing creatures--all capable of wondering at, admiring, and loving each other, and so bound all in one in him, each to the others revealing him. For every human being is like a facet cut in the great diamond to which I may dare liken the father of him who likens his kingdom to a pearl. Every man, woman, child--for the incomplete also is his, and in its very incompleteness reveals him as a progressive worker in his creation--is a revealer of God. I have my message of my great Lord, you have yours. Your dog, your horse tells you about him who cares for all his creatures. None of them came from his hands. Perhaps the precious things of the earth, the coal and the diamonds, the iron and clay and gold, may be said to have come from his hands; but the live things come from his heart--from near the same region whence ourselves we came. How much my horse may, in his own fashion--that is, God's equine way--know of him, I cannot tell, because he cannot tell. Also, we do not know what the horses know, because they are horses, and we are at best, in relation to them, only horsemen. The ways of God go down into microscopic depths, as well as up into telescopic heights--and with more marvel, for there lie the beginnings of life: the immensities of stars and worlds all exist for the sake of less things than they. So with mind; the ways of God go into the depths yet unrevealed to us; he knows his horses and dogs as we cannot know them, because we are not yet pure sons of God. When through our sonship, as Paul teaches, the redemption of

these lower brothers and sisters shall have come, then we shall understand each other better. But now the lord of life has to look on at the wilful torture of multitudes of his creatures. It must be that offences come, but woe unto that man by whom they come! The Lord may seem not to heed, but he sees and knows.

I say, then, that every one of us is something that the other is not, and therefore knows some thing--it may be without knowing that he knows it--which no one else knows; and that it is every one's business, as one of the kingdom of light, and inheritor in it all, to give his portion to the rest; for we are one family, with God at the head and the heart of it, and Jesus Christ, our elder brother, teaching us of the Father, whom he only knows.

We may say, then, that whatever is the source of joy or love, whatever is pure and strong, whatever wakes aspiration, whatever lifts us out of selfishness, whatever is beautiful or admirable--in a word, whatever is of the light--must make a part, however small it may then prove to be in its proportion, of the inheritance of the saints in the light; for, as in the epistle of James, 'Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.'

Children fear heaven, because of the dismal notions the unchildlike give them of it, who, without imagination, receive unquestioning what others, as void of imagination as themselves, represent concerning it. I do not see that one should care to present an agreeable picture of it; for, suppose I could persuade a man that heaven was the perfection of all he could desire around him, what would the man or the truth gain by it? If he knows the Lord, he will not trouble himself about heaven; if he does not know him, he will not be drawn to him by it. I would not care to persuade the feeble Christian that heaven was a place worth going to; I would rather persuade him that no spot in space, no hour in eternity is worth anything to one who remains such as he is. But would that none presumed to teach the little ones what they know nothing of themselves! What have not children suffered from strong endeavour to desire the things they could not love! Well do I remember the pain of the prospect--no, the trouble at not being pleased with the prospect--of being made a pillar in the house of God, and going no more out! Those words were not spoken to the little ones. Yet are they, literally taken, a blessed promise compared with the notion of a continuous church-going! Perhaps no one teaches such a thing; but somehow the children get the dreary fancy: there are ways of involuntary teaching more potent than words. What boy, however fain to be a disciple of Christ and a child of God, would prefer a sermon to his glorious kite, that divinest of toys, with God himself for his playmate, in the blue wind that tossed it hither and thither in the golden void! He might be ready to part with kite and wind and sun, and go down to the grave for his brothers--but surely not that they might be admitted to an everlasting prayer-meeting! For my own part, I rejoice to think that there will be neither church nor chapel in the high countries; yea, that there will be nothing there called religion, and no law but the perfect law of liberty. For how should there be law or religion where every throb of the heart says God! where every song-throat is eager with thanksgiving! where such a tumult of glad waters is for ever bursting from beneath the throne of God, the tears of the gladness of the universe! Religion? Where will be the room for it, when the essence of every thought must be God? Law? What room will there be for law, when everything upon which law could lay a shalt not will be too loathsome to think of? What room for honesty, where love fills full the law to overflowing--where a man would rather drop sheer into the abyss, than wrong his neighbour one hair's-breadth?

Heaven will be continuous touch with God. The very sense of being will in itself be bliss. For the sense of true life, there must be actual, conscious contact with the source of the life; therefore mere life--in itself, in its very essence good--good as the life of God which is our life--must be such bliss as, I think, will need the mitigation of the loftiest joys of communion with our blessed fellows; the mitigation of art in every shape,

and of all combinations of arts; the mitigation of countless services to the incomplete, and hard toil for those who do not yet know their neighbour or their Father. The bliss of pure being will, I say, need these mitigations to render the intensity of it endurable by heart and brain.

To those who care only for things, and not for the souls of them, for the truth, the reality of them, the prospect of inheriting light can have nothing attractive, and for their comfort--how false a comfort!--they may rest assured there is no danger of their being required to take up their inheritance at present. Perhaps they will be left to go on sucking things dry, constantly missing the loveliness of them, until they come at last to loathe the lovely husks, turned to ugliness in their false imaginations. Loving but the body of Truth, even here they come to call it a lie, and break out in maudlin moaning over the illusions of life. The soul of Truth they have lost, because they never loved her. What may they not have to pass through, what purifying fires, before they can even behold her!

The notions of Christians, so called, concerning the state into which they suppose their friends to have entered, and which they speak of as a place of blessedness, are yet such as to justify the bitterness of their lamentation over them, and the heathenish doubt whether they shall know them again. Verily it were a wonder if they did! After a year or two of such a fate, they might well be unrecognizable! One is almost ashamed of writing about such follies. The nirvana is grandeur contrasted with their heaven.

The early Christians might now and then plague Paul with a foolish question, the answer to which plagues us to this day; but was there ever one of them doubted he was going to find his friends again? It is a mere form of Protean unbelief. They believe, they say, that God is love; but they cannot quite believe that he does not make the love in which we are most like him, either a mockery or a torture. Little would any promise of heaven be to me if I might not hope to say, 'I am sorry; forgive me; let what I did in anger or in coldness be nothing, in the name of God and Jesus!'

Many such words will pass, many a self-humiliation have place. The man or woman who is not ready to confess, who is not ready to pour out a heartfelt of regrets--can such a one be an inheritor of the light? It is the joy of a true heart of an heir of light, of a child of that God who loves an open soul--the joy of any man who hates the wrong the more because he has done it, to say, 'I was wrong; I am sorry.' Oh, the sweet winds of repentance and reconciliation and atonement, that will blow from garden to garden of God, in the tender twilights of his kingdom!

Whatever the place be like, one thing is certain, that there will be endless, infinite atonement, ever-growing love. Certain too it is that whatever the divinely human heart desires, it shall not desire in vain. The light which is God, and which is our inheritance because we are the children of God, insures these things. For the heart which desires is made thus to desire. God is; let the earth be glad, and the heaven, and the heaven of heavens! Whatever a father can do to make his children blessed, that will God do for his children.

Let us, then, live in continual expectation, looking for the good things that God will give to men, being their father and their everlasting saviour. If the things I have here come from him, and are so plainly but a beginning, shall I not take them as an earnest of the better to follow? How else can I regard them? For never, in the midst of the good things of this lovely world, have I felt quite at home in it. Never has it shown me things lovely or grand enough to satisfy me.

It is not all I should like for a place to live in. It may be that my dissatisfaction comes from not having eyes open enough, or keen enough, to see and understand what he has given; but it matters little whether the

cause lie in the world or in myself, both being incomplete: God is, and all is well. All that is needed to set the world right enough for me--and no empyrean heaven could be right for me without it--is, that I care for God as he cares for me; that my will and desires keep time and harmony with his music; that I have no thought that springs from myself apart from him; that my individuality have the freedom that belongs to it as born of his individuality, and be in no slavery to my body, or my ancestry, or my prejudices, or any impulse whatever from region unknown; that I be free by obedience to the law of my being, the live and live-making will by which life is life, and my life is myself.

What springs from myself and not from God, is evil; it is a perversion of something of God's. Whatever is not of faith is sin; it is a stream cut off--a stream that cuts itself off from its source, and thinks to run on without it. But light is my inheritance through him whose life is the light of men, to wake in them the life of their father in heaven. Loved be the Lord who in himself generated that life which is the light of men!

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