The dictionary defines “inheritance” as receiving property after the death of its owner. In Scripture, too, inheritance often rests on the principle that ownership transfers only after death, either literally or symbolically (as in a covenant or will). Thus, an heir may manage or steward an inheritance ahead of time, but only after the “testator” (the one giving) dies does the inheritance legally (and fully) become theirs.

In a spiritual sense, this parallels what the Bible teaches: God made a covenant with His people, promising them an inheritance that becomes theirs through Christ’s death and resurrection.

Biblical Foundation: Death, Covenant, and Final Inheritance

Hebrews 9:16-17 (NIV) says:

> “In the case of a will, it is necessary to prove the death of the one who made it, because a will is in force only when somebody has died; it never takes effect while the one who

> made it is living.”

Here the author of Hebrews is arguing that the New Covenant—the inheritance God promises us—could not take effect until Christ died. Without the death, there is no legal transfer of what is promised. In theological terms, Christ’s death is the “price” or the “guarantee” (KJV: “without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins,” Hebrews 9:22) for the inheritance.

What Is the Inheritance? Who Are the Heirs?

The Inheritance

In Hebrews 9:15 (NIV) the inheritance promised under the New Covenant is described as *“eternal redemption”* and a “promised eternal inheritance” for those called and cleansed by Christ’s blood.

When Paul prays in Ephesians 1:18 (NIV), he asks that believers might know *“the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”*

- The “hope” is confident expectation built on what Christ has done (His resurrection, ascension, the giving of the Spirit).
- The “riches of his glorious inheritance” speaks not just of material things, but spiritual realities: forgiveness, adoption, resurrection, fellowship with God, eternal life, and glorification. The inheritance includes *all spiritual blessings in heavenly realms* as earlier in Ephesians 1.18

The Heirs: The Saints

The heirs are those who are *in Christ*, those who have trusted in Him, been regenerated by the Spirit, and live in covenant relationship with God. Paul refers to them variously as saints, God’s children, co-heirs with Christ. The promise of inheritance is tied to faith and to Christ’s finished work.

Theological Richness: Covenant, Predestination, Redemption

To understand why Christ’s death is central to inheritance, it helps to consider:

- Covenant Theology: God’s promises (the Old Covenant and the New Covenant) have been made and ratified through blood (sacrificial system in the Old Testament; Christ’s sacrifice in the New). The covenant promise of inheritance requires the shedding of blood.
- Predestination and Election: In Ephesians 1 Paul writes, *“In Him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”*
  This suggests that the inheritance was planned by God before time (i.e. before

the foundation of the world), and believers are brought into it by grace.

- Redemption and Christ's Sacrifice: Christ's death is the means by which the old covenant (with its shadows and temporary aspects) is replaced by the New—where believers can receive the inheritance permanently, with forgiveness and purification. Hebrews 9 is clear that the first covenant could not make perfect, but Christ's once-for-all offering makes possible the "eternal inheritance."

Eschatological (End Times) Fulfillment

This inheritance is both already and not yet:

- Already in the sense that believers possess certain spiritual blessings now: adoption, the Holy Spirit as a "seal" or guarantee (Ephesians 1:13-14, NIV).
- Not yet in the sense that the full manifestation (resurrection, renewal of the earth, new heaven and new earth) is still to come—when Christ returns and establishes his eternal kingdom. The inheritance will be revealed fully then.

Version Notes & Translation Variations

Because wording sometimes affects nuance, here are a few version-related notes:

- NIV is used throughout for clarity and contemporary language. It emphasizes "his glorious inheritance in the saints."
- In the Revised English Version (REV) commentary on Ephesians 1:18, scholars note that "his inheritance" may mean the inheritance God gives to believers, rather than something God receives.

- The King James Version (KJV) or NKJV often use more formal/archaic language (“heirs,” “inheritance,” “sealed with the Holy Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance”). Differences in phrasing don’t usually change the core meaning but sometimes obscure clarity for modern readers.

Application

- Recognize that Christ’s death was essential—not optional—for the inheritance God promises. Without it, the covenant could not be ratified.
- Be assured that you are an heir—not by your merit, but by faith in Christ and by God’s choice.
- Live in the light of what is to come—cultivate hope, patience, and holiness, knowing the inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and everlasting.
- Share the message: inheritance in Christ is more than an idea; it’s a promise grounded in Scripture, secured by Christ, and will be revealed in full at the end of the age.

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