

Romans 8:12-17

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[0:00] And turn back in your Bibles to Romans chapter 8. We'll be looking at Romans 8 over the next few weeks. But Romans 8 is lifting up the surface of the Christian life.

And showing us something glorious, something victorious. An indestructible hope lies beneath. And what is it? What lies beneath?

The glorious Spirit of God is at work in your life. The Holy Spirit is key to this whole chapter, really. Deep down, the Spirit is powerfully at work. And He's doing far more than we realize. Freeing us and strengthening us.

Sealing our future. Giving us hope and assurance. It may not look like it. But something triumphant is going on. And the Spirit of God powerfully dwells in you.

[1:27] The Christian life is not a life on our own. Or a life facing things in our own strength. Or facing the future alone and just full of fear. No, the Christian life is life in the Spirit of God.

And so if you're not a Christian here today, this is a real insight into what is going on here in the church. What God is doing in this world and among His people, it is something deeper than you may realize.

And it is something God is inviting everyone into. And one of the big things we saw last week is that the Spirit has freed us from sin's power.

So sin makes us guilty. But sin also is like a prison that traps us. It's this force, this pull that keeps us away from God.

But the Spirit has freed us from that. Burst open the prison cells. No condemnation. So we can now actually live for God. And that's where this, today's passage picks up.

[2:39] Paul addresses our freedom in the Christian life. That great, great freedom that we have. And he begins today by saying, with great freedom comes great responsibility.

And also great privilege. And those are two things that I want us to see today about the Christian life. The responsibility and the privilege.

But I first want us to see that responsibility. Now that we are free, we have an obligation to God. This is the responsibility. And this is the first point.

We have an obligation. Look how verse 12 begins. So then. The Spirit has freed us. No guilt.

Sin doesn't rule our lives anymore. So then. Something must happen in your life. Verse 12. So then, brothers. We are debtors.

[3:38] Not to the flesh. To live according to the flesh. Now debtors here. It doesn't mean that we still have debts to pay for our sin. No. Christ has paid all of that on the cross.

No. Debts here means an obligation. A duty toward God. Now that we are free, there is something we must, must do.

We must not live according to the flesh. Now flesh here, it just means sin. Flesh is the sinful aspect to us.

So not just muscle and skin and tissue like that. Not simply that flesh. But flesh is disobedience. It's unholiness. Now that we have been freed from sin's power, we must no longer live for sin.

No longer give in to it. No longer be happy with it. But instead, verse 13, by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body. Now that we are free from sin's rule over us, we are debtors.

[4:43] We are obligated to put our sin to death. Kill it. Which means positively living lives led by the Spirit.

Not sin, but living holy lives. We are debtors to do this. Now that we are free, this is our duty, the must of the Christian life.

So if you've ever wondered, well, if we're forgiven, why do we need to care so much about sin? Why bother with sin if it's already been paid for?

Well, here is the answer. It's because this is now what is owed to God. Not in order to save us, not to pay for our sin, but now that we are saved, this is essential, essential in the Christian life. Putting sin to death. Holiness, it's not this optional extra of the Christian life. It's the very reason why the Spirit has set you free.

[5:53] And so this is telling us something about the Christian life. Yes, we are freed from sin's rule, but sin will still be a reality in our lives.

We have left sin, but sin hasn't left us. It's a bit like when you become a British citizen. I know some of you, that's been the case for you.

When that happens, you now belong to a new country, don't you? A new ruler. But in a way, your birth country still remains inside of you.

Many of you know, my dad moved from Malaysia and became a British citizen, which meant he gave up his Malaysian passport. He now has no obligation to that country anymore.

The Malaysian government has no rule over him. It's completely ended. He now has a new ruler. King Charles is his king. He belongs to a totally different realm.

[6:52] He is now British. And some of that adjustment, it happened very quickly. I've been told he instantly fell in love with fish and chips. He loved rhubarb crumble.

But some Malaysian instincts still remain. He still loves Malaysian food. He still uses chopsticks. He still wears flip-flops around the house.

He's always wearing flip-flops around the house. He left Malaysia, but Malaysia didn't leave him.

Well, in the Christian life, we belong to a new ruler.

We are freed from sin. We are now ruled by the Spirit. We've left sin, but sin hasn't left us. And it takes time to leave.

Some habits, some desires do go quickly, but other things may take a whole lifetime. Speak to the oldest, most mature Christian here today. They know best of all, the Christian life, it is a tension between sin and holiness.

[7:57] And so with this tension inside of us, we are debtors. We have an obligation to not entertain that sin, but to put it to death and to live for holiness, led by the Spirit.

It's like if you have a heart transplant and you're given a new heart. You've been given a second chance, a new life, and it's a wonderful free gift.

No one can take that away, but you are now a debtor. You can't go back to that old life of abusing your heart. No, you are a debtor, obligated to live properly now.

Well, we are all debtors to live for God. And so that means doing something, recognizing our sin and killing it.

And notice, it doesn't say sit back and wait for it to be killed. No, actively put it to death. Because it's always, when we let sin linger and ignore it, that's when it only festers and grows in our life, doesn't it?

[9:09] We let that grumbling and bitterness just sit in our hearts, and it's so easy to ignore. It's actually nice to just sit in it. But slowly, it gets worse and worse, and before we know it, grumbling is just all that we can do.

Sin, it's like mold. It loves to grow in the dark, but bringing it into the light, that's how it dies. Well, now that we are free from sin, this is our duty.

Bring sin into the light and kill it. And that takes real, humble self-reflection, doesn't it? And recognizing, where is that sin lingering in my life?

Well, this now is the Spirit calling us to that. Now that we are free, sin is no longer our ruler. We have left sin, but what sin hasn't left us?

Well, God, he's calling us to something drastic. If there is grumbling, filling your life, just a bitterness, that life is not what we've been freed for.

[10:21] We need to repent and confess it to the Lord and put it to death in our life. Cut it out. If there is lust, whatever thoughts, whatever we're watching, whatever's going on in that relationship, Christ came to free us from that.

And so we are debtors. It needs to be put to death. Those lies, that stealing at work, that anger in the home, it all belongs to the flesh and we now have an obligation to repent, fight it and put it all to death.

Now this side of heaven, it will never be perfect. The Christian life, it's a lifetime of battle against sin, a lifetime of relying on God's grace every single day, knowing his forgiveness every single day.

And that can often be so discouraging because it feels like we're never winning. Many of us here will have just come from a week in the trenches and we can just think, my life is a mess.

This is futile. But, the fact that you face a battle is not failure in the Christian life.

[11:43] It is actually a sign of victory. Underneath the surface, beneath the mess, your battle with sin is a sign that the Spirit has freed you.

Prisoners do not fight in this battle, only the free. Look at verse 13. If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body.

For the Christian, the Spirit is inside of you now giving you strength to put that sin to death. It's a divine work in you and so whatever battles you face, as you go back home and you go to work tomorrow, you are never alone.

The Spirit is the one giving you strength in this fight and it can all seem draining and pointless, but actually, this is the path to life. If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. God's commands, they are never burdensome. They never ruin your life. No, however hard it is to put those things to death and it feels like a part of you is dying, that is actually true living.

[12:58] That is God-given life in the Spirit. And so if you're here this morning and you're looking in to what it means to be a Christian, what it means to follow Jesus, but you look in and you see what you might have to give up or what might have to change in your life and it feels like, well, if I do this, my life's just going to get worse.

This all just seems restrictive. I won't be able to get to live the life that I want to the full in all the ways that I want. Well, actually, when we think that, we've got it all backwards.

The Christian life isn't restrictive. It is true freedom. Jesus came that you may have life and life to the full. And we are debtors to do this, debtors to now live life to the full, life in the Spirit.

And that life, it is not only a sign of victory, it is a sign that we are children of God.

With great freedom, yes, comes great responsibility, but also, with great freedom, comes great, great privilege. And this is the second thing I want us to see about the Christian life, the privilege.

[14:20] I want us to see that we are children of God. We are children of God. Look at these wonderful words in verse 14. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

This is part of the reason we're to fight that sin. We are adopted into God's family. We are children of God. And a new family, it means a new way of life.

So every family has its own ways and instincts, don't they? So think about your Christmas Day routines. We were thinking about this with the kids earlier. Every family has their own way on Christmas Day.

Some families, what do you do first? Maybe you do stockings first. Some do straight, go downstairs, do the big presents first. Some wait till after church. Every family has different standards and expectations.

It's just the way the family does things. And that's why also the first year of marriage can be so tricky, can't it? you have two families merging, and so two ways of life can clash.

[15:29] Well, the Christian life is coming into God's family. And the way of this family is holiness. And we aren't used to that.

And so there will be a clash, that tension inside of us. And so what God's big plan is for the church, his plan in your life, God is shaping us into his family and after his likeness.

To be a son of God, it's to be like our father. The great calling of the Christian life is to be like our God, godliness.

We are shaped by our parents, aren't we? You can look at a boy and think, well, he's just like his dad. You can look at a girl, she's just like her mum. My girls, they're all little northerners, like their mum.

They all say grass and bath. I feel very left out. And why is that? Parents shape us. Children take after their parents.

[16:36] Well, to be a Christian is to be a child of God. It is to have God as our father, being shaped by him, by his spirit.

And so the reason we have this tension, that the reason as Christians we have just come from a week of sin struggles and repentance and needing forgiveness and fighting this messy battle, it is because we are children of God.

So often in the Christian life, we can fall into despair because in the battle, we only see the failures and we can tell ourselves, well, this must mean, I guess I'm not a Christian.

But that battle means you are being led by the spirit. And so verse 14, all who are led by the spirit of God are sons of God.

It all means God is your father and you belong to him. And so now, notice how all this relates to the spirit. Verse 15, to be saved by Christ means we have now received the spirit of adoption.

[17 : 45] So remember that the key to Romans 8 is the Holy Spirit. While Paul again is lifting up the surface of the Christian life and showing us an even deeper work of the spirit.

The spirit not only frees you, but the spirit adopts you, grafts you into God's family forever. So the Christian life, it doesn't only exist in the court of God's justice, not only no condemnation before the judge, but it's actually a lot more.

The Christian life, it exists in the home of God's family. And here in Romans 8, Paul is opening up just the sheer privilege of what that means.

For every single believer here today, you have a relationship with God like no other. By the spirit, do you see, we can cry to God, Abba, Father.

Now the word Abba, it's a term of intimacy. It's what a child calls their loving father. You don't call the prime minister Abba, you call your father Abba.

[18 : 57] Abba. It's the same word as Jesus prayed, actually, to the father in Gethsemane. And this is what Jesus has called us into. As Christians, we can stand side by side with the Lord Jesus Christ himself, our older brother, and with him we can cry to God, Abba, Father.

It's a relationship like no other, a dignity that you have like no other. Any other religion, any other religion at best can only say, Oh God.

But we can cry, Abba, Father. And this means just like a father, our God intimately knows us. He knows the struggles you face.

He knows the battles you are in. He knows the fears and anxieties you have for the future. He knows what's going on in your family. He knows the problems going on in your body.

He knows the troubles at school, the troubles at work. He knows your hopes, your plans, your desires. He is your Abba, Father.

[20 : 12] And in your need, you can cry to him and he will help. This language of crying in verse 15, it's the picture of a child in danger crying out for help.

And any father here, when you hear your little one crying for help, shouting your name, you're there in a flash, aren't you? It's unthinkable that you would leave them.

Well, how much more with our heavenly Father? The Christian life is not one of fear, wondering, will God condemn me?

Is he there to help? Does he even care? No, you have life in the spirit of adoption. And so, the Christian life is one of great comfort, belonging to God as children.

And so, whatever your need is right now, whatever your need is, your heavenly Father wants you to cry to him and he will always give you the grace that you need. It's unthinkable that he would leave you because something lies beneath the surface in your life.

[21 : 20] You have the spirit of adoption. He helps us cry this. When you feel helpless and you turn to God, that's the spirit at work right there.

And verse 16, the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. When we know in our spirit, I just know that I belong to God. Of course, I can come to God right now.

That's the spirit at work right there. And so, the church is at heart a place of belonging. This is where the spirit of adoption is at work, where the spirit dwells.

And so, this is where you come to belong to God's family. This is where you belong to God, our Father. Where we belong to Christ as our older brother and it's where we belong to each other as brothers and sisters.

That is what is so encouraging about our church. As soon as someone is in need, the family surrounds them, don't they? And we must see that for what it is.

[22 : 28] That is the spirit of adoption at work. Your prayers for each other as we rejoice with each other, weep with each other. that is the spirit of adoption.

And so, if you are here today and loneliness is a real difficulty in your life and maybe your earthly family has disappointed you and you're just needing somewhere to belong, well, this is where you come to belong.

This is the true family where you will be loved by the Father in the most perfect way and surrounded by brothers and sisters and you will get to stand side by side with the Lord Jesus and by faith in him

you will get to be a co-heir with Christ.

Look at this final privilege of the Christian life, verse 17. If we are children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

To be a child, it means an inheritance. Our earthly parents have secured something for our future, haven't they? To be a child means we are heirs of something to come.

[23 : 45] Well, as children of God, what is our inheritance? Look at the end of verse 17. Glorified with Christ. Glory. Everlasting resurrection life in a restored creation, beholding the face of our God, that is what is waiting for every single Christian here today.

The spirit inside of you guarantees this inheritance. If you look under the surface of the Christian life, beneath the battles and the mess and the failures, something glorious is going on.

We not only see the spirit doing something now, we see the spirit guaranteeing your future. glory, we stand side by side with Christ, not only in prayer, but waiting for the same inheritance, glory, fellow heirs with Christ.

But look how we get there, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Glory lies ahead, but the path to glory is pretty unglorious.

It's suffering, suffering with Christ, because he took the same path. He is right now in heaven, sat at the right hand of God, but he went through the cross to get there.

[25 : 17] Well, we are all one family, so we all walk the same path. And so the struggles that you face in life, that fighting sin, those daily battles that you face, the pressure from the world, the pressure from our own hearts, the pains and the trials that you are going through, helplessly crying, Abba, Father, please help me.

And you just feel like you are holding on to Christ by a thread. On the surface, it all seems weak and pointless and pretty unglorious, but actually, that is a sign you are on the way to glory.

What you are going through is not pointless, it has a great purpose. God is shaping you into his family and he's using it to bring you to glory. We suffer with Christ in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Christian life may seem messy and insignificant and like one constant battle, people. But beneath the surface, there is something glorious.

You have the spirit of adoption. You belong to the Father and so you are an heir. You are part of something eternal. And so the Father has something in store for you.

[26 : 41] Put your hope in Christ, suffer with Christ, and you will be glorified with him. Let's pray. Let's pray.