

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 8:9-17 – Abba, Father Sermon Notes



Background

We've been going through the book of Romans for 8 months now. Last time we were together, we ended with **Romans 8:8**. In that verse Paul summarized the preceding section of Scripture by stating, "those who are in the flesh are not able to please God." Previously, he had told us that those who live their lives according to the flesh have set their minds on the things of the flesh. But he also said that those who set their minds on the things of the flesh are actively hostile towards God. Those who live their lives according to the flesh are focused on pleasing self, instead of pleasing God.

And, we concluded earlier that since those who are unsaved don't have the Holy Spirit, they are unable to resist their sin nature. But, we've also learned that genuine Christians can also be overcome by their sin nature. So, what's the difference? The difference is that Christians don't enjoy being controlled by their sin nature. We want to be in fellowship with God, so we confess our sins to restore that fellowship. This, in fact, is a clear indication that someone is a true Christian, someone who wants to be in fellowship with God.

In this section we will learn two new amazing truths about this salvation that we have, and we will see one old truth that we need to keep reminding ourselves of over and over again. One of the two new truths is that God wants to be our life coach, our personal guide through the pathways of life. But, in order for our guide to lead us in the paths of righteousness, we have to listen to Him. That means maintaining a constant 2-way communication channel with Him. The other new truth is that we have been adopted into God's family. We are now legally His children and heirs. But – as we will learn here, being God's heir also means that we will suffer.

The old truth that we are once again reminded of is the fact that someone who is genuinely saved cannot lose his or her salvation. Because we have been adopted into God's family and He can never disinherit us, we can never lose this salvation. It is eternal!

Romans 8:9-11

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

Last time, Paul ended with, "but those who are in the flesh cannot please God." We determined that the expression, "those who are in the flesh," refers to unregenerate people, that is, those who are unsaved; they are not Christians. Paul now cements this notion further by what he says next.

"However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit" This is a contrasting statement to the previous one indicating that those who are in the flesh cannot also be in the spirit. You are either one or the other. But how do we know who is in the flesh and who is in the spirit? Paul explains this in the next phrase. He says, "However, you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, **if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you.**" But what does Paul mean by the expression, "if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you"? He explains this in [Ephesians 1:13,14](#), where he says,

... you also, after listening to the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.
([Ephesians 1:13-14](#))

Those who are saved are sealed with the Holy Spirit and He is our pledge, our guarantee, He actually lives in us. This pledge is a token given as a promise that the transaction will be completed. If for some reason the transaction is not completed, the pledge is retained by the recipient. Therefore, if God were to not grant us our inheritance at the end of the age as He promised, then He would have to leave the Holy Spirit (our guarantee) with us, thus causing light to be united with darkness, which He tells us in [2 Corinthians 6:14](#) cannot happen. Therefore, once we are saved and have the Holy Spirit, we cannot lose that salvation! It is guaranteed!

What Paul tells us here is that the one who has the Holy Spirit dwelling in him (or her) is not in the flesh; he (or she) is in the Spirit. Now, just to make sure he is understood, Paul then says, "**Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.**" In other words, if you don't have the guarantee, you are not saved and you do not belong to Christ.

Those who aren't saved don't have the Spirit of God and, therefore, are in the flesh. They are controlled by their sinful fleshly desires. However, those who are saved have the Holy Spirit living in them and should not be controlled by the flesh. Notice I said, "should not." As we have said before, Christians have a free will to obey God or not. Sometimes we let our flesh control us, causing us to sin. We have a choice: to be controlled by our flesh or to be submitted to God! The unsaved can't make this choice. They do not have a free will; they are bound by the law of sin to obey their sinful desires because they are "in the flesh."

In order to fully understand what Paul is saying, we have to look at a Greek grammatical construction known as "Correlative (or paired) Conjunctions." These are a pair of conjunctions

that have a correlation between each other. Two of these conjunctions are *men* and *de*. They are used in the following manner, “*men* (followed by the first phrase) ... *de* (followed by the second phrase).” The effect of this construction is to say, “on the one hand (first phrase), but on the other hand (second phrase).”

So, what Paul says in this verse is “*And if (since) Christ is in you, on the one hand the body is dead because of sin, but on the other hand the spirit is alive because of righteousness.*” In other words, if Christ is in you, that is, if you are saved, then your body is technically dead because of your sinfulness, but because you have accepted Christ as Savior, through the grace of God (who has declared you to be righteousness), your spirit is alive and you will spend eternity in the presence of God because of that righteousness.

What he doesn't say, but clearly implies, is that if you aren't saved (if you don't have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in you) then your body is still dead because of sin. But, because you are a sinner and have not been declared righteous, you have no hope of spiritual life either. You will have to pay the penalty for your own sins, and you will enter the presence of the Almighty as an unrighteous sinner. In other words, you are spiritually dead (now and forever).

Next, we see one of the great promises in the Bible, the promise of a new life for this mortal body. Paul starts off with, “*But if the Spirit of Him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwells in you.*” Now we have to ask, “Who raised Jesus from the dead?” Did He raise Himself, or did someone else do it, and if so, who was it? To answer this question let's look at a few verses.

... God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways. (*Acts 3:26*)

Paul, an apostle—not *sent* from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead (*Galatians 1:1*)

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come. (*1Thessalonians 1:10*)

We can see from these verses that it is God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Therefore, in the current verse Paul is talking about the Spirit of God the Father, who is none other than the Holy Spirit, the third person of the trinity. And Paul says that if the Holy Spirit dwells in you (remember that He has been given by God as a pledge, as a seal of the promise of redemption to all who are saved), then God the Father will also make your mortal body alive by this same Spirit who dwells in you. In other words, for all of us who are saved by His grace, God the Father has promised that just as He raised up Jesus, He will also make our dead bodies alive by his Holy Spirit.

For Christians who are alive when Jesus returns at the rapture, this means that our dead body will be changed “*in a moment, in a twinkling of the eye*” into an immortal body. If we have already passed from this earthly life, it means that our dead body will be awakened and made alive as an immortal body.

Romans 8:12-14

So then, brothers, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die, but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the practices of the body, you will live. For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

We've just been told that God will give us the same kind of immortal body that Jesus Christ has right now. That's part of eternal life, having an eternal body. It will be a body that will not know pain and will not grow old; a body far superior to the one that we now possess.

Now, he makes a very strong conclusion: since we will receive an immortal body, we have no reason to live as debtors to this mortal body. In other words, we should not treat this body as if we owe it anything. We should not satisfy the desires and cravings of this body because not only does it not own us, but it will be replaced by a much better body some day.

Paul says, "if you are living according to the flesh, you must die." The words "you must" are from the Greek word *mellō*, which usually means "it is about to happen." It is normally followed by a verb in the future infinitive form. However, in this verse it is followed by a verb in the present infinitive form. This makes the expression stronger than a future verb. It indicates a necessary consequence. Therefore, we could translate this as "if you are living according to the flesh, you **are** going to die." And – remember that death means separation. If you are living according to the flesh you are going to be eternally separated from the Spirit and presence of God!

In chapter eight Paul talked about how a person who tries to obtain righteousness by obeying laws and rules will never achieve his or her objective. This is because the law actually causes us to sin. He then went on to proclaim his own frustration with the fact that even though he wants to do what is right all the time, he doesn't always do it.

This tendency in all mankind is the result of our sin nature. Paul started off the current chapter with the proclamation, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We who have been saved by the grace of God have been declared to be righteous, so we are free from the penalty of our sin. We also have been given the Holy Spirit of God as our guarantee and as our guide.

Here, Paul says something very similar: "For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." We see, then, that this is another characteristic of a true child of God. If you are a son (or daughter) of God, then you are continually, every day, in the present, being led by His Spirit. The picture is of a guide who is leading the way through a wilderness, showing the proper paths to take so that the follower won't get lost.

However – please note! It is difficult to lead someone who won't follow. And, it is difficult to follow someone with whom you have very little communication. In fact, the closer the relationship you have with the guide, the easier it is for the guide to direct you and the easier it is for you to hear and trust the advice of the guide. Sometimes the choices of paths are obvious and sometimes they aren't. Sometimes, what appears to be the obvious path is not the way to go at all. That's why we need a guide.

Romans 8:15-17

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, also heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

Before we get into this section, let me say a few things about the word *abba*. It is a transliteration. That is, it is brought over from the original language letter for letter, or sound for sound. This is an

Aramaic word that means, “father” as a term of endearment, similar to how we might call our earthly father “dad,” “daddy,” or “papa.”

In the previous two chapters Paul spent considerable time showing that before we were saved, we were slaves to sin and the condemnation of the Law. In this chapter he has been showing us that we are free from the bondage of the Law and slavery to sin. We who are saved have a free will to sin or not to sin. In other words, we are not forced to sin due to our being ruled by our sin nature. Instead, we are free to resist that temptation to sin. The reason for this freedom is shown to us in the current verse. The Spirit that we have dwelling in us is the Spirit of God. What Paul now tells us is that this Spirit is not a Spirit of slavery. He has been showing us throughout this letter that there are two states of being: slavery and submission. Slavery implies a condition that is forced on us, whereas submission is a condition we choose. If we are not saved, we walk according to the flesh and we are slaves to sin. If, on the other hand, we walk according to the Spirit it is because we are saved and have chosen to submit ourselves to God. The Holy Spirit does not hold us in slavery against our will; we received the Spirit because we willingly submitted ourselves to God.

Now for another of the most precious truths of the New Testament! The Spirit that we have received, the Holy Spirit of God, is one of adoption. In other words, when we accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as payment for our sins, we also willingly submitted ourselves to His Lordship (He, God, is our master now, not our sin nature). In response to this we were adopted by God as His child. And, as a seal of that adoption He gave us the Holy Spirit. Once God has adopted us, He cannot un-adopt us because of that sealing Spirit. He is our Spirit of adoption and because of this we can refer to God as our Father, and we can call him papa or daddy.

Unfortunately, today there are many today who think that God is their Father but He really isn't. So, how can we tell for sure that we are saved and God is our Father? We can know that we are saved, that we have been adopted by God the Father, because He has given the Holy Spirit exclusively to His children. The Spirit is not only our seal and the guarantee of our inheritance; He is also the only true witness of our salvation and adoption by God.

So exactly how does the Holy Spirit “bear witness with our spirit?” The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit in those still, quiet moments, when we sense the peace that only He can give. A peace that passes all understanding, a peace that exists in the midst of trials and tribulation. It is that calm assurance that we have submitted to the Father and we have committed to doing His will above our own. We have accepted His grace in the form of the blood of Christ because we believe that Jesus died to pay for our sins, and He rose again from the grave. It's that assurance that we are saved! It's the Spirit's witness.

Now Paul goes on to say that if we are children of God, then we are heirs. Note here that only legitimate children can be heirs, and under the Jewish laws of the times adopted children were legitimate children. In fact, an adopted child could not be disowned or dis-inherited the way a natural born child could. So, the fact that we are adopted children means that our inheritance is guaranteed!

But what are we inheriting? Some say we are inheriting heaven, but that's not all we will inherit. We are told here that we are heirs (inheritors) of God himself. That is not to say that we will become gods as some religions believe. It simply means that we are heirs of the eternity of God. Just as Jesus (the man) received an eternal body and shares in eternal fellowship with God the Father, we also will receive an eternal body as God's heirs and will share eternal fellowship with Him.

Paul now throws a bit of a wrinkle in here. He says, “if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” This, again, is a first-class conditional statement in Greek, which we have learned previously can be translated as, “since.” This should be both a challenge and an encouragement to us all. It says that we will suffer as Christians! But it also says that Jesus Christ suffers with us when we suffer. Here is another verse from Paul’s second letter to Timothy that talks about that suffering:

Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. (2 Timothy 3:12)

We should be prepared to suffer because we will if we are His children and we are pursuing a godly life. But when we do suffer, He is right there with us. He knows the most intimate details of the trials that we’re going through because He is suffering with us.

So What?

This salvation that we hold so dear is not just our “get out of Hell free” card. It’s not just our “ticket into Heaven.” It is the undeserved privilege and honor of standing before our Holy God as one who has fulfilled all righteousness and one who possesses His life-giving Spirit for all eternity.

If you believe you are a sinner and that Jesus died to pay the penalty of your sin, God promises that He will give you the same kind of immortal body that Jesus has right now! That’s an eternal promise that can’t be undone. Since the Spirit is our seal and our promise, we can’t lose it and it can’t be taken away from us no matter what we do. We have the Spirit of God and His promise of eternal life. That’s eternal security! Have you noticed how many times in the book of Romans that Paul assures us that we cannot lose our salvation?

But, as it is said, actions speak louder than words. A child of the King of Kings should act like a child of the King of Kings. So where do your actions say you will spend eternity? Do they say that you are destined to die eternally or that you will live eternally in God’s presence as His adopted son or daughter?

Remember, we have a Guide who knows all, and He wants to lead us in the paths that will bring Him the most glory and praise. Are you willing to follow your Guide? Do you talk to your Guide? Do you listen to Him and obey Him when He talks to you? Are you daily being led by the Holy Spirit of God?

Do you experience that close personal relationship with your Heavenly Father? Do you converse with Him regularly? Do you share your deepest desires and fears with Him? Do you listen to his wise advice? Or ... is He more of a stranger than “daddy?”

Have you experienced the Holy Spirit bearing witness with your spirit? Have you felt Him talking to you? If so, you are a genuine, guaranteed child of God. If not, then perhaps it’s time to fall on your knees before the God of all creation, confessing your sinfulness, and asking Him for salvation, submitting yourself to your Lord and Savior. Finally, and I want you to think carefully about this: Is Jesus Christ your Lord, your Master, your Owner?

Let’s pray.