

Brad Jordan / General Adult

Risen and Reigning: An Easter Series / Adoption; Union with Christ; Children of God / Romans 8:12–17

This sermon from Romans 8:12–17 explores the believer’s transformation from slavery to sonship through the power of the Holy Spirit. It emphasizes that while we have been set free from the dominion of sin, we are not without obligation—we are now debtors to live according to the Spirit. Paul’s teaching reveals that true freedom in Christ comes with a new identity and a new calling. Through the doctrine of adoption, believers are assured of their place in God’s family, receiving not only the Spirit’s guidance but also the intimacy of calling God “Abba, Father.” This adoption brings with it a promised inheritance, though it also includes suffering with Christ. Yet even in suffering, we are assured of glory to come. The sermon closes with a challenge: If we are truly children of God, is there evidence of the Spirit’s work in us? And if not—what keeps us from crying out to the Father today?

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## Introduction

There are events in life that mark us as people so drastically that we are able to remember exactly where we were and what we were doing when they occurred. For example on January 28, 1986 I was in the 5th grade, that morning they had wheeled the TV’s in for us to watch the launch of the Space Shuttle Challenger; On November 9, 1989 my family, along with millions of other Americans, watched the evening news as the Berlin Wall fell; and of course on September 11, 2001 I was standing in a conference room at DuPont, training a group of mechanics on a new computer program when we received word of a plane striking the twin towers in NYC. All of us have some events that have marked our life in different ways, some disastrously, while others we happily celebrate.

Most families not only have dates such as the ones I previously mentioned, but also dates that are specific to those families. Some of these dates are difficult; such as the loss of a grandparent, parent, or even the loss of a child. However there are also those dates where we celebrate. In our family, like most we have many of these days, however, there is one date that is a little different than the rest. In January of 2002 Lisa and I made a decision after we had gone through a very difficult time in our life. What

we never expected to happen as a result of that decision, however, was the speed with which our lives would change. Within 12 weeks of our decision we were standing in Baptist Medical Center in Columbia, SC as we stood at the bedside of the birth-mother of our oldest daughter. Over the next few months as we cared for our daughter we continued through the legal process of adopting her into our family, which we completed during the first week of August. Although she was certainly already a part of our family as far as Lisa and I and the rest of our family were concerned, it wasn't until the judge ruled that she became ours, legally. She officially became our child and part of our family. The legal code of the State of South Carolina concerning this judgement reads "After the final decree of adoption is entered, the relationship of parent and child and all the rights, duties, and other legal consequences of the natural relationship of parent and child exist between the adoptee, the adoptive parent, and the kindred of the adoptive parent." (SC Code of Laws 20-7-1770 (1976, as amended))

The past three weeks we have seen, as we stood at the foot of the mountain, our total inability as we were reminded in Romans 3:10 that "There is none righteous, not even one;"; the truth that our only hope for being declared righteous in the eyes of God, of being truly justified, is through faith in Christ alone, and finally the truth that, through the power of the resurrection, not only have we died to sin but have been made alive with Christ. This signifies that our desires have changed, the old man is dead and we walk in newness of life, knowing that "Sin shall not be a master over us for we are no longer under the law, but under grace." In our time together this morning we will be looking at a text from the eighth chapter of Romans. A passage that not only reaffirms this radical change that has occurred in the life of a believer and reminds us of our new way of life, but also demonstrates for us the truth that, through the assurance of adoption, we are brought completely into the family of God in which we share in all of the promises of God's word.

Which brings us to our text for this morning, please turn in our Bibles to Romans 8 and we will be reading from verses 1 - 17. Our focal text from this passage will be verses 12-17.

## Text

Please stand for the reading of God's holy, inerrant, infallible, complete,

sufficient and authoritative Word:

**Romans 8:1–17 LSB**

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh,

so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.

For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace,

because the mind set on the flesh is *at* enmity toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*,

and those who are in the flesh are not able to please God.

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.

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.

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*.

Almighty God,

We are loved with an everlasting love, clothed in eternal righteousness, our peace flowing like a river, our comforts many and large, our joy and triumph unutterable, our souls lively with knowledge of Your salvation, and our sense of justification is unclouded. Lord there is little that we need to pray for; Christ smiles upon our souls as a ray of heaven and our supplications are swallowed up in praise. How sweet is the glorious doctrine of election when based upon Your word and shaped within our souls. Lord we thank You that You will keep the sinners You have loved, and that You have promised they will not turn away from You—because without that, none of us would ever make it to heaven. We wrong the work of grace in our hearts when we deny our new nature and our eternal life. If Jesus were not our righteousness and redemption we would sink into the deepest recesses of hell by our misdeeds, shortcomings, unbelief, and lack of love. If our sanctification were not by the power of the Holy Spirit, there is no sin that we would not commit. Father, we pray how long until we obtain His mind and are conformed to His image? All the things of life we count as less than nothing when compared to His love. All our boasts are lost with one glimpse of Your electing favor. We know, father, that all the treasures of a million worlds could not make us richer, happier or more content, for Your unsearchable riches are ours. Heavenly Father, one moment of communion with Christ, one glimpse of true grace is inexpressible and incalculable. However, there is no longing for your

presence without knowledge of the sweetness of it; and no such knowledge without the inward working of Your Spirit in our hearts; indeed, there would be no love of You in our hearts at all unless You from all eternity did elect me, call me, adopt me, and save me to the uttermost. Father we give thanksgiving and praise to You for Your covenant of grace and we pray all of these things in the name of our precious Lord and Saviour, Christ Jesus, amen.

## Romans 8:1-11

Before we dive headlong into our specific text this morning I want to make sure that we understand what God demonstrates through Paul in verses 1-11. He opens with this beautiful conclusion that as believers are no longer under condemnation. This is accomplished by the imputed perfect righteousness of Christ. He has demonstrated that we are free from the law of sin and death, that the dominion that sin had over us has been removed and we are now free in Christ. This freedom is demonstrated in the truths that we now walk according to the Spirit with our minds set on the Spirit. That we have obtained peace with God and now live in that peace through the Holy Spirit.

## Obligated

Last week as we came to the final verse in our text we were presented with the statement that we are “no longer under the law, but under grace”. This is a tremendous truth for a believer, it speaks to the freedom that we have obtained in Christ but unfortunately, it is a passage that is also greatly misused and misinterpreted. It has been taken by those who claim that they are believers and used as a license to act in ways that are completely contrary to the teaching of the word of God and the new nature that they have supposedly obtained.

In our text for this morning we begin with the words “So then,” again these are words that serve the purpose of drawing us to a logical conclusion based on the truths that we have been taught. This is why it is necessary to read the verses in their context and to study that context. It takes very little effort to realize the negative effects of mishandling these truths of scripture, which is why Paul makes it clear, that in light of all that has been

taught, there is a profound truth here that we so often miss.

That truth is that we misunderstand freedom to mean that we are no longer under any type of obligation. That we can now live as ones that only answer to ourselves, that only need to ourselves, that we are now free to not only choose our path and our identity, but to do so in a way that completely contradicts the natural order of this world. The world around us clearly displays what Paul meant when he wrote:

**Romans 1:21–32 LSB**

For even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Professing to be wise, they became fools,

and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the likeness of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them over to dishonorable passions; for their females exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

and in the same way also the males abandoned the natural function of the female and burned in their desire toward one another, males with males committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to an unfit mind, to do those things which are not proper,

having been filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; *they are gossips,*

slanderers, haters of God, violent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful;

and although they know the righteous requirement of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice *them*.

Even as we come to faith in Christ, there is still the matter of the sinful flesh that remains, which is why Paul brings us to this concluding statement of "we are under obligation". As Christians we have absolutely been set free... free from the sinful nature that has kept us in bondage, it is not that we are no longer obligated to anything, it simply means that our obligation has changed.

This change in obligation gets to the heart of the matter. The word in the Greek can also be translated debtor, if we translated it this way, what we would read would be "So then, brothers, we are debtors". Notice that Paul is writing to fellow believers, identifying them as brothers, those who are part of the same family, and he says to them, and to us, since we too are also part of that family, we are debtors. The word debtor defines someone who is under a financial obligation to someone else. When you borrow money to purchase a house, or a car, or a new pair of shoes, you become a debtor. Legally speaking you have entered into a contractual arrangement that says that you will pay back the money that you borrowed to obtain that which you wanted. You are absolutely free to live in the house, drive the car and wear the shoes... as long as you remember your obligation to the bank to repay that which you owe.

For us as believers, we are still debtors, we are still obligated, it is just that the obligation has changed. All we want to teach people in our churches is how free they are without helping them to understand that they are free from the desires of the flesh but now obligated to live according to the Spirit. This is what Paul means when he continues by stating that we are no longer in debt to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

This is amazing grace, we read of our inability to come, that there are none who seek, and this is true because of the obligation to the flesh, the desire

that is created by the sinful nature that we have, but that is exactly what we have been set free from. Paul elaborates further in verse 13. There are those who have misconstrued this as a possibility to lose one's salvation, stating that even someone who is a true believer, if they do not successfully put to death the sin in their lives will ultimately be damned.

There are two issues with this; 1. it makes salvation contingent on our actions and not God's grace and 2. Scripture is clear that regenerate people still sin, 1 John 1:8 "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." yet even as we may still sin, the power of the Holy Spirit will keep us from continuing in that sin, Ephesians 1:13–14 "In Him, 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." 1 John 3:9 "Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God." and Jude 24 "Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,"

What we do see here in verse 13 is that in the life of a believer, there is a continual action of putting to death our sins, that this is done, not of our own strength and power but in the power of the Holy Spirit. The verb here is in the present active tense which means that it is a continual action, but it is also in the indicative mood. This means that in the clause there is a statement of fact, here it is "if by the Spirit you are".

Within this verse, indeed within the pages of Holy Scripture there is an absolute command that we are given as believers when it comes to our lives. That command, that imperative, is that our lives are to be lived in obedience to God. Peter is helpful when he writes in 1 Peter 1:15-16

**1 Peter 1:15–16 LSB**

but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* conduct;

because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY."

The beautiful truth that undergirds or supports this is, is that this is the guaranteed result of the work of the Spirit in our lives. Romans 8:29-30



### **Romans 8:29–30 LSB**

Because those whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brothers;

and those whom He predestined, He also called; and those whom He called, He also justified; and those whom He justified, He also glorified.

### **Philippians 3:12–14 LSB**

Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Brothers, I do not consider myself as having laid hold of *it* yet, but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,

I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

### **1 John 3:2 LSB**

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not been manifested as yet what we will be. We know that when He is manifested, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

## Assurance

Paul concludes verse 13 by stating that if you do these things, put to death the ways of the flesh, you will live. Please do not miss this... God is not telling us that we are to, on our own strength, power, fortitude or ability are we to accomplish these things, they are to be accomplished in the power of the Spirit. Not only are we to do this, but the end result is guaranteed, based not off of anything we have done or will do, but by what God has done and will do in the lives of His people and Paul takes the next four verse to demonstrate how and why this is a reality.

Verse 14 draws a definitive contrast between those living according to the flesh and those living according to the Spirit. If verse 13 left doubt in the minds of people regarding the security of a believer, verse 14 should dash that doubt. He writes that those being led by the Spirit of God are sons of

God. Only those led by the Spirit can be classified in this manner. Only those led by the Spirit are God's people, His sheep. These are the ones Jesus was speaking of in John 10:27–28 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand."

Our first measure of assurance is that we are children of God because we follow the guide of the Spirit.

Secondly, we are assured by the difference between what we were and what we have become. The first clause in verse 14 describes our former state. As people enslaved, in bondage to sin, we live in a state of fear. We need to understand this word fear in order to understand the meaning of this clause. Fear here is not terror at the idea of something jumping out of the night and scaring us. Rather it deals with the distress we feel when we think that there is an impending threat or condition that we feel anxious about or concerned about. Examples of this might be fear that we lose something that we hold valuable, such as the loss of personal property, it could be that something that we do not think that we can live without, money, objects, people, or even the ability to do what we want when we want because we think that is how you define freedom.

Notice, though that in the very act of fearing that we will lose these things we become enslaved by them. We do what ever is necessary to keep or obtain, those things we fear losing. Paul says that we have not received this spirit of fear so that we have to be anxious or worry about things. Here, specifically, Paul is referring to the fear that if we do everything that we should do we will not obtain the prize.

In contrast, he demonstrates that the Spirit we have received is one of a legal changing of status. The old master and all of the old ties have been eliminated and we have been welcomed into the family as sons who can now cry out to the Father in a way that was only used in the closed family circle. I hared with you earlier regarding the new status in the adoption process, but the decree also speaks of the former ties, it decrees that all rights and responsibilities have been terminated. As believers the ties to the old man, old life, former ways, have been completely and totally severed.

Our third measure of Assurance is found in verse 16. Not only do we have

the measure of assurance in being led by the Spirit, the severing of the former ties and the granted rights and privileges of one whose legal status has been changed but then His spirit testifies with ours. The final assurance is this realization that the inward conviction we feel is endorsed by the Holy Spirit. It is evidenced in the truth of who we have now become. Although we place a number on these verses for reference, verse 16 is a continuation of verse 15. In fact, the very fact that we can cry out "Abba! Father!" is as EA Obeng writes:

### **Romans**

"Abba, Father" is an acclamatory prayer in which the Holy Spirit joins with the human spirit to bear witness to the fact that Christians are children of God

## The Promised Result

We conclude our text this morning with the understanding of the promise that we receive as true sons and daughters of God. To finish off this demonstration of our change in status Paul demonstrates that those who have been brought into the kingdom, those who have been made the children of God are those who are heirs. This goes back to an understanding of what it means to be truly adopted, to be truly grafted into the vine, to use Christ's description of this same truth. In adoption, it is not just that this family has decided to take you in, provide for you and care for you, but that you have been given equal status with any biological children.

Hebrews 2:10-17 helps to understand just what this signifies:

### **Hebrews 2:10-17 LSB**

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of One; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brothers,

saying,

"I WILL RECOUNT YOUR NAME TO MY BROTHERS,

IN THE MIDST OF THE ASSEMBLY I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”

And again,

“I WILL PUT MY TRUST IN HIM.”

And again,

“BEHOLD, I AND THE CHILDREN WHOM GOD HAS GIVEN ME.”

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,

and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the seed of Abraham.

Therefore, He had to be made like His brothers in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Although we do not experience the same physical suffering in the redemptive action of Christ we do still share the suffering of the opposition from the world. Philippians 3:10 “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,” and 1 Peter 4:13 “But to the degree you are sharing the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.” . Mounce is helpful as he writes:

### **Romans 3. Living in the Spirit (8:1–39)**

As members of the same family we share in the trials of life as well as the benefits.

and Hunter as he writes:

### **Romans**

“For Christ the path of suffering was the path to glory. For his JOINT-HEIRS

it must be the same”

## Conclusion

As we bring our time in this rich and weighty passage to a close, let us step back and consider the full scope of what the apostle Paul has placed before us. He has shown us the newness of life that comes not by human will or religious striving, but by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. He has reminded us that we are no longer debtors to the flesh, no longer bound by its corrupt demands or deceived by its false promises. We are debtors, yes—but not to sin. We are now obligated to the Spirit, and that is not a burden—it is freedom. Freedom to live as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

And this freedom is grounded in the doctrine of adoption—a truth that is both deeply theological and profoundly personal. Just as I shared with you the story of the legal adoption of our daughter and the transformation that came with that decree, so also we have received a spiritual decree from heaven itself. We who once were far off, who once were strangers, have been brought near—not merely as guests or servants, but as sons and daughters with full legal standing, full access, and full inheritance.

And what is the evidence of this adoption? Paul tells us plainly: the Spirit within us cries, “Abba! Father!” This is not a formal petition. This is not the language of a courtroom. This is the cry of a child to their father. It is intimate. It is immediate. It is real. And it is a mark of the Spirit’s presence within us. It is the assurance that we are not what we once were. We have been adopted—and in being adopted, we have been transformed.

This assurance, however, does not exempt us from suffering. In fact, Paul tells us that if we are children, then we are also heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him. This is not the fine print of the Christian life; it is the pattern. The path of the Son is the path of the sons. Christ’s way was marked by sorrow, by rejection, by the cross—and so too will ours be. But it is also the path to resurrection, to glory, to inheritance incorruptible and undefiled.

So here is the question that must be asked—a question not just of doctrine, but of devotion. **If you claim to be a child of God, is there evidence of the Spirit’s work in you? Are you putting to death the deeds of the**

## **body by the power of the Spirit? Are you walking as one who knows they are adopted, assured, and secure in Christ?**

This is not a call to legalism, nor is it a summons to self-reformation. This is a summons to surrender—to yield to the Spirit, to live under His leading, and to trust the promises of the God who has called you His own. It is a call to remember that you are not your own—you were bought with a price. It is a call to rejoice that you are no longer a slave, but a son. No longer cast out, but brought near. No longer under condemnation, but clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

And if you are not a child of God, if the Spirit has not yet made His dwelling within you—then today is the day to cry out to Him. Not in fear, but in faith. Not in hesitation, but in hope. Come to the Father who stands ready to receive, adopt, and redeem.

Because here's the glorious truth: once you are His, you are His forever.

## **Closing Prayer**

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,  
We come before You in awe of the grace that has been lavished upon us in Christ Jesus. Thank You for the truth of Your Word today—truth that reminds us we are no longer slaves to sin, no longer bound by the flesh, but sons and daughters adopted into Your eternal family. What mercy, what love, that You would not only justify us through the righteousness of Your Son, but also call us Your children and make us heirs of glory.

Lord, we confess that we are often forgetful of who we are in Christ. We confess that we are tempted to live as debtors to the flesh, to fear what has already been conquered, and to seek our comfort in what cannot satisfy. Forgive us, Lord, and renew our minds by the power of Your Spirit.

May we leave this place with confidence—not in ourselves, but in Your promises. Help us to walk by the Spirit, to daily put to death the deeds of the body, and to rejoice in the assurance of our adoption. Teach us to cry out, "Abba, Father," not as a ritual, but as children who know they are loved.

Strengthen us for the road ahead. Whether in suffering or in joy, remind us

that we are co-heirs with Christ and that a greater glory awaits. Until that day, keep us faithful, rooted in Your Word, dependent on Your Spirit, and focused on the hope of our inheritance.

We pray all of this in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ—our Redeemer, our Righteousness, and our Elder Brother.

Amen.