

“CHILDREN OF GOD”

I. Introduction

- A. In our study of the previous section in Romans 8, we saw that Christians are distinguished by the fact that we are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.
 - 1. We receive a new identity when we are united to Christ.
 - 2. Though we still have to deal with the polluting influence of indwelling sin, sin no longer sits in the command seat in the control center of our lives.
 - 3. Instead, the indwelling Holy Spirit has the place of supreme influence in our lives.
 - 4. The Spirit gives us new hearts, hearts that are willing and ready to live unto Christ.
- B. In the verses that we are studying today, we see Paul drawing an inference from what he has just said about the new identity that we receive when we become Christians.
 - 1. Paul infers that this new identity brings with it an obligation, the obligation to live according to the Spirit and to mortify the deeds of the flesh.
 - 2. And because the Spirit who indwells us is the Spirit of adoption, being led by the Spirit is a defining mark of our identity as children of God.

II. God’s Children Mortify the Deeds of the Body (12-13)

- A. Our text begins with Paul telling us that “we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”
 - 1. As we noted in a sermon on an earlier portion of this chapter, in this context “flesh” refers to human nature in its state of rebellion

against God.

2. Christians are no longer “in the flesh.”
 3. We have been delivered from the flesh’s dominion, though we are still subject to its polluting influence.
 4. Our obligation as believers is not to live in servitude to the flesh but to serve in the new life of the Spirit.
 5. The fact that we have died to sin in Christ means the flesh has no valid claim on us.
 6. You are under no obligation to comply with the flesh’s attempts to exact tribute from you.
 7. What did sin ever do for you to put you in its debt?
 8. The only thing sin has ever brought you is misery and woe.
 9. You owe the flesh nothing.
- B. At the same time, there is a sense in which Christians are debtors.
1. We have an obligation to live according to the Spirit rather than according to the flesh.
 2. Paul warns that those who live according to the flesh will die.
 3. This is not referring to physical death because all people, whether believers or unbelievers, die physically.
 4. Instead, Paul is speaking of death as eternal separation from the comfortable presence of God and eternal exposure to God’s just wrath and displeasure.
 5. That is the wages that will be paid to all who live according to the flesh.

- C. It is important for us to understand the warning of verse 13 in the larger context of this chapter.
1. Paul is not saying that we can lose our salvation or that we have to earn our salvation.
 2. We have been freed from the law's condemnation once and for all.
 3. That can never change.
 4. Christ has fully paid our debt, and God will not demand a double payment for sin.
 5. Paul issues this warning so that we will take sin seriously.
 6. All who are in the Spirit will heed this warning.
 7. Those who have been united to Christ will not live according to the flesh.
 8. This does not mean that we will never sin, but it does mean we will fight against sin all our days.
- D. This lifelong battle is described in our text as a matter of putting to death the deeds of the body.
1. The older term for this is "mortification."
 2. This is a concept that is often misunderstood.
 3. Mortification is not to be confused with asceticism, the practice of extreme self-denial.
 4. Mortification is not perfectionism, the notion that Christians can attain sinless perfection in this life.
 5. Mortification is not only concerned with external sins.

6. Instead, mortification is the Christian's lifelong duty to engage in ruthless warfare with the sin that dwells within us.
- E. Our text makes it clear that mortification is both something that we are commanded to do and something that can only be done "by the Spirit."
1. There is a dual agency in mortification, just as there is in sanctification, which is the larger category that includes mortification.
 2. Your personal effort in putting sin to death is necessary.
 3. It is not simply a matter of, 'Let go and let God.'
 4. At the same time, you are completely dependent on the Spirit to carry out this work.
 5. The Spirit is the one who sanctifies you.
 6. He does this by uniting you to Christ, who is your source of sanctification.
- F. The verb that is translated here as "put to death" is in the present tense, which in Greek carries the sense of a continuous action.
1. This tells us that putting sin to death is not a one time thing but an ongoing effort.
 2. It is also an all-encompassing effort.
 3. Mortification is the lifelong work of putting all sin to death.
 4. It involves putting all the deeds of the body to death.
 5. You cannot be selective when it comes to what sins you will deal with.

6. You cannot ask the Spirit to help you put one sin to death and expect him to leave the other sins in your life alone.
 7. You cannot set yourself to getting rid of a besetting sin that is a source of embarrassment to you while cherishing other sins.
 8. If you try to do that, you should not be surprised if the Spirit lets you go on in your struggle with that besetting sin.
 9. He knows that if he helps you overcome that sin you will think that you no longer need him.
- G. One other thing to note about what this text teaches about mortification is that the “you” in verse 13 is plural in the Greek.
1. This tells us that mortification is to be carried out in the context of Christian fellowship.
 2. You are not on your own in the battle against sin.
 3. You need the support and encouragement and accountability of your brothers and sisters in Christ as you strive to put to death the deeds of the body.

III. God’s Children Have the Spirit of Adoption (14-16)

- A. Having spoken of the duty of mortification, Paul then turns to discuss the effects of the Spirit’s presence in our lives.
1. He begins by saying that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”
 2. Being led by the Holy Spirit means being under the Spirit’s governance.
 3. He regulates our thoughts, our feelings, and our conduct.

4. It is important to note that Paul does not speak of the Spirit's leading in the way that many Christians today use this terminology.
 5. Perhaps you have heard a Christian say that the Spirit led him to make a certain decision.
 6. 'The Spirit led me to do such and such.'
 7. Perhaps you have spoken that way yourself.
 8. We have to be careful, because this way of speaking essentially makes a decision unassailable.
 9. Who am I to question a decision that you made under the supposed leading of the Spirit?
 10. This is not the way this text speaks of being led by the Spirit.
 11. For Paul, being led by the Spirit is a matter of contending against sin and pursuing holiness.
 12. The Spirit's leading is not something that is only for those Christians who have mystical tendencies.
 13. All Christians are led by the Spirit.
- B. Our text continues by saying that the Spirit whom we have received is not the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but the Spirit of adoption.
1. Our service to God is not rendered out of the slavish fear of punishment that is characteristic of being under the law.
 2. Instead, we serve God because we have filial feelings of affection, reverence, and confidence toward God.
 3. As Martin Luther puts it, "Not to be under the law is to do good things, and abstain from wicked things, not through compulsion of the law, but by free love, and with pleasure." [*Marrow*, 210]

4. We all have a tendency to fall back into a slavish mindset.
 5. We are inclined to think that our standing with God is based on how well we are doing in living the Christian life.
 6. This is why we need to be reminded again and again that our adoption renders us God's children forever.
 7. As Octavius Winslow explains, "it is an inalienable, unchangeable relation... [God] is as much our Father when he chastises, as when he approves; as much so when he frowns, as when he smiles; as much so when he brims the cup of adversity, as when he bids us drink the cup of salvation." [*No Condemnation in Christ Jesus*, 172-173]
- C. The language of adoption reminds us that we are not God's children by nature but by God's grace alone.
1. Contrary to what many people believe, not everyone is a child of God.
 2. Only when the Holy Spirit effectually calls us and brings us into a saving relation to Christ are we adopted as children of God.
 3. Our status as "sons of God" refers both to our character and to the privileges that belong to us.
 4. On one hand, we are called to live up to our family name and reflect the likeness of our heavenly Father.
 5. On the other hand, we are now entitled to all the benefits that God bestows upon his children.
- D. Paul also tells us that the Spirit of adoption enables us to cry out to God with childlike trust, saying, "Abba! Father!"
1. 'Abba' is the Aramaic word for father.

2. It is a very tender and intimate title of address, but it is not in any sense flippant or casual or childish.
 3. The reason why Paul used this word was because Aramaic was his everyday language.
 4. This was the most appropriate word for him to use to express his own filial feelings toward God.
 5. At the same time, he also used the Greek word for father because he knew that not all of his readers would be familiar with Aramaic.
- E. Our childlike trust in God is confirmed by the witness of the Holy Spirit, who testifies with our spirit that we are children of God.
1. The Spirit convinces us that our sins are forgiven and that we really are accepted by God.
 2. The Spirit gives this testimony in a variety of ways.
 3. He makes the Lord Jesus increasingly precious to our souls.
 4. He causes us to grow in poverty of spirit and gives us a deeper sense of our weakness and unworthiness.
 5. He abases our pride and causes us to seek God's glory instead of our own glory.
 6. He causes our hearts to more quickly shrink from sin.
 7. He makes our conscience more sensitive to the touch of guilt and makes confession a more frequent habit.
 8. He implants a desire for holiness in us and begins to produce the fruits of holiness in our lives.
 9. He produces love for God and for our fellow believers in our hearts.

10. In doing these things, the Spirit bears witness to our true identity.
11. In the words of Thomas Goodwin, the Spirit writes “first all graces in us, and then teacheth our consciences to read his handwriting.” [cited in Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, 228]

IV. God’s Children Are Heirs with Christ (17)

- A. This brings us to the final verse in our text, where Paul draws the conclusion that if we are God’s children then we are fellow heirs with Christ.
 1. The term ‘heirs’ indicates that we are entitled to come into possession of an inheritance that is not yet in our possession.
 2. We have not yet received the fullness of the blessings that Christ has secured for us.
 3. The fact that it is described as an inheritance means it is absolutely certain.
 4. It cannot be changed or taken away.
 5. We have title to it on the basis of Christ’s finished work.
 6. Moreover, this inheritance is the same inheritance that Christ himself has already received.
 7. Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren in the kingdom of God.
 8. He shares his inheritance with us.
 9. As he says in the book of Revelation, “The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.” (Rev. 3:21)
- B. While Christ has already secured this inheritance for all the elect, Paul does say that our eventual reception of it is contingent on the fact that we

suffer with Christ in order that we may be glorified with him.

1. This does not mean that we merit our eternal inheritance by the sufferings that we endure in this life.
2. It simply means that our experience of suffering in this life does not stand in contradiction to our hope of glory.
3. Despite what so many false teachers say, Christians are not exempted from suffering.
4. On the contrary, the Christian life is marked by all of the ordinary sorrows of life in this world.
5. We have health problems.
6. We experience sorrow and loss and loneliness.
7. We have financial difficulties.
8. We have relational conflicts.
9. We struggle with temptation and sin.
10. We live in a world that is opposed to our Lord and Savior.
11. We suffer in many ways, but none of these things calls our inheritance into question.
12. Just as Jesus suffered before entering into glory, so also must we suffer before we are glorified with him.
13. In fact, God uses our sufferings to prepare us for glory.

V. Conclusion

- A. While the Spirit of adoption does not completely eradicate sin in the lives of God's children, he does weaken its power and bring it under subjection.

1. Nevertheless, the Spirit does not carry out this work in the way that we would intuitively expect.
 2. Instead of always leading us from victory unto victory, he often leads us into deeper discoveries of the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness in our hearts.
 3. He does this in order that we might be humbled, in order that we might look to him for help and support, and in order that we might be more watchful against future occasions of sin.
- B. This is what it means to be led by the Spirit.
1. This is how he bears witness with our spirits that we really are children of God.
 2. The Spirit does not sanctify us in a manner that causes us to think that we are any less dependent on Christ now than when we first believed.
 3. He sanctifies us in a manner that makes it abundantly clear that God is the source of our life in Christ Jesus, whom he made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (see 1 Cor. 1:30)