

Series: The Reign of Grace

Today's Message: Those Led by God's Spirit are God's Sons

Jeff Kennedy / November 6, 2022

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh, ¹³ because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷ and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Introduction: Teaching a child "Stranger Danger" is a key part of their development. We teach them to look both ways when they cross the street. We teach them what to do in an emergency, we have them learn their home address and phone numbers. And we teach them that adults do not need children's help to find things, that good people will never offer you free candy, and that anyone inviting you to see their new puppy in their van or vehicle will want to harm them.

Parents or teachers, by contrast, they lead the child to safety, security, resources, and help.

Transition: Likewise, the Holy Spirit is a friend, a comforter, and a leader. He leads into the paths of righteousness never leading us astray. He leads us to life and never back to death. He leads us out of the sin and faithlessness of our culture and to the green pastures of God's abundance and security. He always leads us to share our faith with others who are lost in sin.

Last week, we learned that the Holy Spirit is God and that he has invaded the Christian life with His transforming presence. The believer's new reality is that they live in the abundant resources of God's grace; the reason we have this new reality is because Jesus died for our sins, taking our condemnation upon himself, and the result of this transformation is a change of our position, a change of our mindset, and a change of our walk—how we live.

Verses 12–17 now transition us from our present life of Spirit empowerment to a future hope of heaven and new creation.

Main Idea: *The Spirit leads the believer into new life of liberty from sin and the rejoicing and security of our sonship.*

Paul first tells us that...

I. The Spirit leads us into a new life (Romans 8:12–14). This new life is in place of the old life obligated and enslaved to the law of God with our minds, while enslaved to the law of sin in our flesh.

How do we apply this new life in Christ we've received by grace? The means God's Spirit uses to lead us.

1. We are released from a former obligation (Rom 8:12) “So then, brothers and sisters, we are not obligated to the flesh to live according to the flesh,”

This word for “obligated” here is actually a noun in Greek, and it is an accounting or financial metaphor referring to a debtor, or one who is obligated to pay back what they owe. For the Christian, that obligation has been satisfied and paid in full. While we tend to speak of Christ's atonement **in terms of vicarious liability**—that is, a legal pardon for sin and assuaging God's judicial wrath, we must be reminded that the NT uses other metaphors or images to describe the atonement, not the least of which is the **cancelling of a debt owed.**

Mark 10:45 (1 Timothy 2:5–6) “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a *ransom* for many.”

Colossians 2:14 “He erased the *certificate of debt*, with its *obligations*, that was against us and opposed to us, and has taken it away by nailing it to the cross.” No longer debtors, the payment for our sin has been made. And hallelujah, we are released from our bondage to that which formerly enslaved us. Jesus paid it all.

Illus. Christian Assembly Church in Eagle Rock, California, said it raised enough money to pay off the medical debt of 5,555 struggling families in the greater Los Angeles area. The church did this, not only to express the goodwill of the Gospel, but to become a living illustration of what Christ has done for us.

Christ paid a debt we owed but could not pay.

And we are no longer obligated, debtors to serve the flesh, to be driven mercilessly by the currents of selfishness and sin.

2. We are crucified daily with Christ (Rom 8:13) “because if you live according to the flesh, you are going to die. But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Walking according to the flesh brings death, but walking according to the Spirit, which includes putting to death (or crucifying) the old pattern brings life. We do this mainly by *counting ourselves dead with Christ* (see message from

Romans 6). Paul said to the Galatians in 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” So, as we said a few weeks ago, we are to *count ourselves* dead to sin—consider it to be a settled reality for the Christian. This is what it means to crucify the old man, still with us, but now the believer takes up his cross daily to follow Jesus, dying that which previously held us in bondage.

And notice Paul’s motivation—he does feel obligated to follow and serve Christ—but not as a drudgery while he misses out on all the “fun” he could’ve had in the world. No. He lives by faith in God’s Son because he loved Paul and gave himself for Paul. We are crucified daily to sin because God loved us and gave himself for us.

- 3. Our minds dwell on heavenly matters rather than worldly interests (8:5)** “but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit.” We mentioned this briefly last week, but let’s fill in the picture this morning. Paul wrote to the Colossians in 3:1–10 “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² ***Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*** ³ ***For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ*** in God.” The Scripture says God has given us all things for our enjoyment. No one can enjoy and extract all the marrow out of life like the Christian. But we are ultimately focused on an eternal reward that awaits us.

Now, let me ask a question—*Where is Jesus?* 1 Peter 3:22 “Jesus who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God with the angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.” So, the NT affirms that Christ is ascended (Acts 1:11 “this same Jesus, who has been taken *into heaven*”; Luke 24:51 “he left them and was carried up *into heaven*”). So again I ask, *where is Jesus?* He is in heaven seated at the right hand of God’s throne.

Who enters the Kingdom of God/Heaven?

John 3:3 “Truly I tell you, unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...6 whatever is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will ***enter the kingdom of heaven***, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven...John 6:40 “For this is ***the will of my Father***: that everyone who ***sees*** the Son and ***believes*** in him will have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

Who enters heaven? Born-again believers. The only people going into Christ's heavenly Kingdom are those who are born again by the Spirit and those who do the will of the Father, which is to believe on the Lord Jesus for salvation.

What is Jesus preparing for the born-again believer?

John 14:1–3 “Don't let your heart be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I am ***going to prepare a place for you?*** ³ If I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and ***take you to myself***, so that ***where I am you may be also.***” Jesus promised the disciples—born again believers, that he would go away to prepare or open the way into heaven for them, returning to take them to be where he also is.

What awaits the believer upon death?

2 Corinthians 5:7–9 “In fact, we are confident, and we would prefer to be ***away from the body and at home with the Lord.*** ⁹ Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to him.” Whatever the state we find ourselves in—our souls at home in the body or having died taken home to be with the Lord—our aim is to please God by doing his will.

Philippians 1:21– “For me, to ***live is Christ and to die is gain.*** ²² Now if I live on in the flesh, this means fruitful work for me; and I don't know which one I should choose. ²³ I am torn between the two. I long to ***depart and be with Christ—*** which is far better— ²⁴ but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.”

1 Thess 4:14 “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have ***fallen asleep.***”

Between now and the time Jesus returns to make all things new—to bring us resurrected bodies and he brings heaven to earth, where is the dead believer? At home with the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven.

Illus. Let's say you save up enough money and are able to travel to a place you've dreamed about for many years. The vacation of your lifetime is within reach. But to get there you must buy plane tickets, plan and pack, get transportation to the airport, you go through long TSA security lines, wait hours at the terminal for your plane to arrive—board the plane, negotiate space in the overhead bin for your carry on, sit in a cramped seat next to a weird person who want to watch

that filthy, disgusting Game of Thrones on their phones next to you—you take your Dramamine, sleep for a while, get woken up by the flight attendant who rams your knees sticking out in the aisle with her cart, she gives you the smallest possible bag of stale pretzels to eat, but eventually you find yourself arriving at your destination. Your heart soars at the announcement that the plane is making its final descent to this beautiful paradise destination where there will be palm trees and sugar sand beaches and icy blue waters.

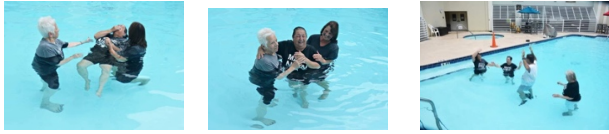
Why did you endure the hardships and annoyances of travel with a generally cheerful spirit? Because your mind was set on the destination—the wonders and treasures and new experiences that it brings.

And setting our minds on heavenly things makes all the difference in the world. And it doesn't mean we don't pay attention to all the details, all the headaches, heartaches, inconveniences and aggravations, or even the joys of this life. As Paul said, we make our aim to please God whether we are residing in the body or out of it. But our focus, the fixation of our lives is Jesus as we live our lives with heaven in view.

Illus. I've never met anyone who is more obsessed with heaven than my mom. Now, as a 76 year old lady, she eats right, gets her exercise, has a wonderful social life at the Senior Citizens housing in Florida, pays her bills, keeps the oil changed in her car, watches too much Fox News...she loves sappy romantic movies on the Hallmark channel, and enjoys swimming in the pool, in the ocean, restaurants by the beach; during Christmas and birthdays she gives thoughtful gifts and writes encouraging notes, she pays attention to needful things—but if you talk to Sharon it will take you all of 2 minutes to find out what that little Pentecostal lady is all about. You know that you are talking with someone whose eyes have been enlarged for heaven's glories. She is obsessed with Jesus and her eternal reward in heaven. You say then, "Well doesn't being heavenly minded mean you're no earthly good?" I don't know who these people are that those who say that have met, but I highly suspect that the so-called "heavenly minded" people they've encountered are not heavenly minded at all.

Because someone who is gripped with the reality of heaven and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ wants to pass it on.

For example, yeah, Sharon enjoys swimming and exercising in her pool at the Senior Citizens complex, here's what mom enjoys more than that...



She is a person who is singularly uninterested in the accoutrements of this world. Time is short. We must be about our father's business and not be enamored nor ensnared by the distractions of this world which are passing away. Whether we are in the body or out of this world—we make it our aim to please God as employees and employers, in our practice of sabbath and leisure and home life—we are diligent to please God in all things—but also vigilant to fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith.

The believer has been released from our former debt to the flesh to serve it (Rom 8:12).

We are crucified with our savior now walking in the newness of Holy Spirit life (Rom 8:13).

Our minds are set on our destination—our heavenly home with Christ (Rom 8:5).

II. The Spirit adopts us into a new family (Rom 8:15–17).

Paul then tells us, we've been adopted, by means of the Spirit, into a God's family. Why does he write this with the very next stroke of the pen? Because we constantly struggle with doubt that we are going to make it. And Paul wants to remind us of the assurance of our faith and to impart a security—*we belong to Jesus, sons and daughters by rebirth and adoption.*

Illus. The issue in our adoption is a change in identity—this new identity becomes the fundamental new reality of the believer.

We often hear about “identity” in a worldly context. As an organizational principle, Identity Politics is entangled in the notion that some social groups are oppressed; that is, that one's identity in a minority group makes one particularly susceptible to cultural imperialism which is taken to be that act of the majority culture stereotyping, erasing ethnic distinctiveness, or the appropriation of ethnic distinction, violence, exploitation, marginalization, or any action resulting in the minority group's experience of powerlessness.

I want to be clear here—God hates injustice. If you or I, for example, were wrongly accused of a crime we didn't commit, we would want the justice system to work in our favor. So long as there are sinners in the world there will be racism, preferential treatment of the privileged, violence, exploitation, and slavery (40 million slaves globally, 50k sex trafficked women in the US alone). And the Christian, more than anyone, should work to see those evils in society and in the world remedied.

The freedom that Christ brings is not just my personal salvation so I can go to the Kingdom of heaven when I die—But God has brought his world-righting salvation in Christ. And while it begins in the hearts, minds and lives of the people on whom God has poured out his Spirit, we are also a going, sending, outwardly looking people—seeking to infiltrate the culture with the life-giving grace of heaven. We don't just want social justice, we want salvation justice—the justice that grows out of the seedbed of the gospel.

But here's the problem with identity politics—it ignores all that has been accomplished in the cross.

- **Identity politics reduces a person's identity to ethnic or social distinctiveness rather than our union with Christ.** Our fundamental identity is in Christ and his cross as his people, not in those social or ethnic issues that distinguish us from every other group. 1 Corinthians 12:13 “For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether **slaves or free**—and we were all given one Spirit to drink.” Galatians 3:28 “For those of you who were baptized

into Christ have been clothed with Christ. ²⁸ There is *no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female*; since you are all one in Christ Jesus.” *What he’s addressing here are not ontological distinctions—that is, there are slaves and free, male and females, ethnic Jews and Greeks.* But in terms of distinctions that fracture us rather than unite us—these walls of division are torn down in Jesus and his cross. And my concern about identity politics is precisely that it redefines a person according to those distinctives that Paul says have been obliterated as walls of division.

What is the biblical vision of “identity”? Revelation gives it to us. John saw people from every tribe, ethnicity, language and culture worshiping before Christ’s throne. This is where the human race is going—without erasing people’s ethnic, tribal, language or cultural distinctives, God’s goal is for a diverse human race united together in Christ around his throne.

Our identity has been changed—we were sinners in need of rescue and debtors in need of ransom, and debtors in need of regeneration. The Spirit has now given us a fundamentally new identity as God’s children, adopted into his family.

1. **The Spirit is received, replacing our fear with an assurance of sonship (Rom 8:15)** The Spirit adopts us into Christ’s family, enabling us to legally and justly cry out “Abba, Father!” The Spirit is the Father’s promise to every believer—he is God’s gift to the heart of all who trust in Christ for salvation. **Abba** is distinguished from **Pater** (both meaning “father”) in that—I could address your father as *Pater*, but I would never address your dad as *Abba*—I could only address my father as *Abba*. It’s the personal term for “my honored father.”

He tells us that we’ve received the Spirit which enables us to cry out Abba—addressing God as our personal father. The Spirit is God’s grace to us.

2. **The Spirit testifies that we are God’s children (Romans 8:16)** “The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children,” “Testify” here is a word meaning “To offer credible testimony to the truth.” The Spirit witnesses to our inner man that we are the children of God. Why? Because by the Spirit we have believed the Gospel.

The Spirit of God does not give an inner witness that I am a child of God apart from the truth of God. The Spirit never testifies to a false Jesus, he never perjures himself on the witness stand.

Titus 3:6–7 “He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior ⁷ so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life.” If someone denies that Jesus Christ is our Savior, or that we’ve been justified by grace through faith alone—that person cannot have the Spirit poured out in their lives.

The Spirit provides an inner-authenticating witness that convinces us that we are indeed the children of God. The term “testifies” again is a courtroom term—the Spirit takes the witness stand to testify credibly to the truth. We belong to God. We’ve been adopted into his family, legally we can in good conscience cry out “Abba” which is our new status—we are the children of God.

3. **The Spirit sustains us in suffering (Romans 8:17)** “and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.” This is evidenced by the grace and privilege of suffering for his name, which results in our glory (just as Christ sufferings on the cross resulted in his exaltation to God’s throne).

We have been given the privilege to suffer for Christ.

1 Peter 4:13 “Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed.”

Everyone wants to cross the Red Sea, but no one wants the Egyptians breathing down their necks. We all want to go the promise land, but who of us wants to go the long route, ***through the wilderness of pain and suffering, through the deserts of despair and loss, through the battles with the Amalekites at Refidim.***

The vocation of the coheir is suffering unto glory. And the Spirit of God enables us to bear up under pressure and persecution for the gospel—which is the path that all true disciples must take.

When they put that cross-beam on Jesus’ back he walked down a street that we now call the via Dolorosa—the way of suffering. When a believer takes up their cross and follows Jesus, we rejoice that we are counted worthy to suffer for his name.

So today I want to issue a charge to those baptized and by extension all of us:

- The baptized believer has been released from a former debt to the flesh and is to daily crucify sinful desires, saying no to ungodliness (Rom 8:12).
- We are to walk in the newness of resurrection life while we wait our blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our Great God and Savior—Jesus Christ (Rom 8:13).

- Our minds are set on our destination—our heavenly home with Christ (Rom 8:5). And by that we are able to endure the hardships of life, the temptations to assimilate and become absorbed into a sinful culture.
- We confess that we are recipients of third person of the Trinity—God the Holy Spirit who has adopted us into his family—whereby we legally cry out “Abba—our honored Father.”
- The Spirit assures us of this sonship, not only with a legal change of status, but an inner witness that we are his children.