

## **“Living in the Spirit”**

Romans 8:1-27

May 13, 2007

A mother passed by her son's bedroom and was astonished to see that his bed was nicely made and everything was picked up. Then she saw an envelope, propped up prominently on the pillow that was addressed to "Mom." With the worst premonition she opened the envelope with trembling hands and read the letter.

*Dear Mom:*

*It is with great regret and sorrow that I'm writing you. I had to elope with my new girlfriend because I wanted to avoid a scene with Dad and you.*

*I have been finding real passion with Stacy and she is so nice. But I knew you would not approve of her because of all her piercing, tattoos, tight motorcycle clothes and the fact that she is much older than I am. But it's not only the passion...Mom she's pregnant.*

*Stacy said that we will be very happy. She owns a trailer in the woods and has a stack of firewood for the whole winter. We share a dream of having many more children. Stacy has opened my eyes to the fact that marijuana doesn't really hurt anyone.*

*We'll be growing it for ourselves and trading it with the other people that live nearby for cocaine and ecstasy. In the meantime we will pray that science will find a cure for AIDS so Stacy can get better. She deserves it.*

*Don't worry Mom. I'm 15 and I know how to take care of myself. Someday I'm sure that we will be back to visit so that you can get to know your grandchildren.*

*Love Your Son,  
John*

*PS. Mom, none of the above is true. I'm over at Tommy's house. I just wanted to remind you that there are worse things in life than the report card that's in my center desk drawer.*

*I love you.*

*Call me when it's safe to come home.*

(Author unknown, received in an e-mail from “The Old Gray Dog” Jim Tuckett).

Call me when it is safe to come home.

For the Apostle Paul in the letter to the Romans, Jesus Christ is the call that it is safe to come home. The choice is between hiding in sin or life in the Spirit. Those are the only two options:

unsuccessfully trying to hide in sin or life in the Spirit. We hide because we do not want to face the consequences of our sin. Yet, even in our hiding, we find ourselves banished from Eden, banished from communion with God, left in the hell of trying to re-establish our own righteousness. The more we try, the more we realize that we cannot.

“Wretched man that I am, who will save me from this body of sin?” Paul writes to the church. The answer to that question, Paul knows, is not himself. Instead, he says, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”

Turn with me to Romans 8:1-27.

## **Life in the Spirit**

This passage is the culmination of a long lesson about man’s inability to achieve righteousness on his own; about how righteousness is reckoned to us only through faith in Jesus Christ. That reckoning of righteousness – the means by which it happens, the “how” question answered – is through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the “law of the Spirit” that has set us free from the law of sin and death. It is the phone call that it is safe to come home.

Friends, we talked a few weeks ago about how the power of the Holy Spirit is manifesting the judgment and holiness of God; here we see how that *same* manifestation is grace and life for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Paul could not set it out much more clearly for us: die in your sin, live in the Spirit of Christ.

What is the difference?

Living in the flesh means more to Paul than simply sexual sin. It is life outside of Christ, trying to establish our righteousness by our own efforts to obey the law – or, the even bigger folly of disregarding righteousness or the law of God altogether as unimportant. Scripture tells us “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’...But the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Living in the flesh means being condemned. Living in the flesh is having our minds set on things of the flesh, and setting our mind on things of the flesh is death. The mind set on the flesh is hostile to God and cannot please God. Living in the flesh is existing in bondage and slavery to sin; destined for condemnation and death.

Living in the Spirit, on the other hand, means that we are judged to be righteous on account of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for us. Jesus’ righteousness is credited to us. God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, he sent Jesus to die for us so that we might be saved. “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.” (verse 11).

Living in the Spirit means that we have life. We have peace with God. We are pleasing to God; it means that we are submitting to God’s law. We are debtors – not to sin or the flesh – but to life and to the one who gives us life through Jesus Christ. Life in the Spirit is joy, it is good news to

the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed; it is the favor of the Lord.

## **Adoption**

Life in the Spirit means that we have a spirit of “adoption.” This is powerful imagery. William Barclay, in his commentary on the Romans (p. 105-106), is helpful. Remember: Paul is writing to the church *in Rome*.

It is only when we understand how serious and complicated a step Roman adoption was that we really understand the depths of meaning in this passage.

Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Roman *patria potestas*. This was the father’s power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days was actually the power of life and death. In regard to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one *patria potestas* to another.

There were two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio* (think: emancipation), and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the *patria potestas* was held to be broken. There followed a ceremony called *vindicatio* (think: vindication). The adopting father went to the *praetor*, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his *patria potestas*. When all this was completed, the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and impressive step.

But it is the consequences of adoption which are most significant for the picture that is in Paul’s mind. ... (First), the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. ... (Second), He became heir to his new father’s estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them. (Third), the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance all debts were cancelled.

“We are not given a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear,” Paul writes in verse 15, “you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ (both Jew and Gentile), it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.”

Life in the Spirit is the gift of grace. We have not earned our status as children of God, it is a gift to us. We have no right to look down on anyone else as if we have somehow merited this favor of God; rather, we can only share the good news that God is calling everyone to this blessing.

This is the example of Paul's life. Prior to his Damascus road conversion, he persecuted the early church. The book of Acts records how Paul (then Saul) looked on in favor as Stephen was stoned to death for bearing witness to Jesus. Paul wrote in Philippians 3,

If anyone has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

His credentials of the flesh.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Life in the Spirit is the spirit of adoption!

Who do you know who is trying to hide from God? Do you know anyone who is lost, alone, living outside of Christ and afraid? Do you know anyone who says (or thinks), "You know, I am a pretty good person, better than most, surely God will let me in to heaven"? That is the deception of life in the flesh and it leads to condemnation and death. These are people for whom the message of adoption and life in the Spirit is urgent and critical and *good news*. Life in the Spirit means not having to wonder whether we are good enough to be children of God; it means that God has adopted us despite our *not* being good enough. We get to say "Abba! Father!" because of Jesus' righteousness that has been given to us as a gift, not because we were good enough to get it.

## **Suffering**

Note, here, that this is not a "pie-in-the-sky" promise. Paul is very clear that co-heirs with Christ will share in his suffering. Again, Paul's life is instructive. After his Damascus road conversion, his early training in the Antioch Church, Paul set out to share the good news with the Gentiles. His life in the Spirit was marked with earthly suffering.

In his second letter to the Corinthian church, he details some of the things that have happened during ministry,

Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in dangers from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. (II Cor. 11:24-27).

Later, as he writes to the church in Rome, he says, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.” Suffering is part of the Christian life. Sorry, but it is true and it is what Scripture teaches over and over again.

Our adoption as children of God does not put a bubble around us, preventing us from experiencing loss, hatred, pain, and the slings and arrows of a sinful world. Just as Christ suffered, just as his disciples suffered; so it is that we can expect to suffer in this life.

Life in the Spirit means we are not alone in our times of hardship, our times of struggle, our times of suffering. Life in the Spirit means that we know that we are waiting for the full reality of our adoption. We do not now see everything that God has promised; we still live in hope for the ultimate manifestation of the kingdom of God.

“In hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”

And not alone.

### **Hope of things to come**

Living in the Spirit means life and peace with God and adoption as his children. It means we will share in the suffering of Christ, but it also means that we will not suffer alone.

“The Spirit helps us in our weakness. ...The Spirit intercedes [in prayer] with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

We live in the here and now. We struggle, we wait, we hope. These things are just the beginning. They are not the end.

C.S. Lewis, at the end of the Narnia series, *The Last Battle*, talks about the hope of eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit this way, with Aslan representing Christ:

Aslan turned to them and said, “You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.”

Lucy said, “We’re so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our world so often.”

“No fear of that,” said Aslan. “Have you not guessed?”

Their hearts leaped and a wild hope rose within them.

“There *was* a real railway accident,” said Aslan softly. “Your father and mother and all of you are – as you used to call it in the Shadowlands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning.”

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Life in the Holy Spirit is *eternal* life. What we live and experience here are only the cover and title page. The dream will end – then we will see face to face in the morning.

### Conclusion

As you go forward from this place today, go in the confidence of the hope you have through the power of the Holy Spirit. If you have the Spirit of Christ – confessing with your lips that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior, and believing in your heart that God raised him from the dead – you are saved from sin. You have peace with God. You have life. Not maybe – really.

You have been adopted as a child of God and co-heir with Christ.

You will join in Christ's suffering; but you will be sustained by the power of the Holy Spirit.

If the Spirit of Christ is in you, you have the assurance of eternal life in the kingdom of God, which goes on forever; and in which every chapter is better than the one before.

“Why should we tarry when Jesus is pleading, Pleading for you and for me? Why should we linger and heed not His mercies, Mercies for you and for me? Come home, come home, You who are weary, come home. Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling, Calling, “O sinner, come home!” (Softly and Tenderly).

Life in the Holy Spirit is the call to come home – it is life.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

8:45 Prayer/offertory

10:00 offertory