

Spirit of Adoption

Romans 8:12—17

All believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, but not all believers are allowing themselves to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. We are all secure in our position in Christ and therefore we are all assured that we will never lose our salvation. Knowing that we do not need to worry about remaining saved gives us the freedom to move on into spiritual maturity. This happens as we learn to renew the mind and allow the Holy Spirit to work in us so that we can bear fruit. Paul continues to teach us why we should be walking in the Spirit, and gives us a glimpse into our inheritance.

Debtors to God

Paul begins verse 12 with *therefore* to show that he is summing up what he just told us. We are dead to sin (chapter 6) and to the Law (chapter 7). We have the indwelling Holy Spirit who has separated us from the law of sin and death. We are now to operate under the Law of the Spirit who has set believers free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2). When we operate in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are fulfilling the Law (Romans 8:3). Since God has done everything for us in terms of our salvation, we are now indebted to Him to allow Him to use us for His glory.

We are now “locked up” in Christ, and this understanding should give us the impetus to give ourselves over to Him as obedient servants of righteousness:

Romans 6:16—18 16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? 17 But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18 Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

We will be slaves to either the sin nature, or to our new nature. The first is controlled by us while the second is controlled by the Holy Spirit. The only reason we would allow ourselves to be controlled by the flesh is to please ourselves. Anything done in the flesh cannot please the Lord and therefore will not bear good fruit. Just as the normal life for an unbeliever is to walk in the flesh, the normal life for a believer is to walk in the Spirit, allowing Him to work in and through us.

Bought with a price

Why should we give ourselves over to God? Because He made our salvation possible by sending His Son to shed His blood, the payment for sins. Having been purchased, we are no longer our own, but we belong to God (Acts 20:28; 1 Corinthians 6:19—20; 7:23). I now owe Him everything. Unbelievers think that they are in charge of their lives, that they are the master of their own destiny. Scripture, however, gives a much different picture. They are called servants of sin because everything they do is done through the body of sin, the old nature. They are incapable of breaking free from their sin nature, and they will end up being eternally confined in the Lake of Fire. They think they are free to do what they want, but they are actually slaves to their fleshly, evil and godless nature.

Believers, however, have been unbound from the old, sinful nature, and we have become captives of God. He purchased us out of the confines of sin and elevated us into the heavenly places. Once we understand where we were and then realize who we have become in Christ, our response should be one of great gratitude and servitude. The more we learn about God and what He has done, the more willing we will be to give ourselves back to Him in service. Paul understood that it was essential for us to have an intimate knowledge of God (1 Corinthians 2:2). This knowledge of God is revealed to the believer through the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12—16). How amazing that we can have the mind of Christ! This means we are able to think and understand on the spiritual level, unlike those who are not saved.

The things we understand and marvel at as we study Scripture are the same things the world scoffs at. They are unable to discern spiritual things because they are trying to do so with the natural mind.

Being able to comprehend these deeper spiritual truths is a strong indication that we have the indwelling Holy Spirit. He also helps us discern if someone is a believer or not. Unbelievers who are trying to act spiritual are often easy to spot because we can distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit through the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Spirit of adoption (verses 14—17)

Paul is using the book of Romans to establish us (set us firmly) in our position in Christ. We can rest in that position because God has done everything for us because we have reached out to Him in faith. He will not only save us, but give us an inheritance of eternal life along with many spiritual blessings. According to Romans 8:15, we HAVE received the Spirit of adoption. Adoption is not about coming into a family, as the word is used now, but is actually about the coming of age to receive an inheritance. When we are saved, we have been put into the position as sons. (Note: you do not want to be put into the position of a daughter because it was the son who received the inheritance. We are all sons when it comes to inheritance, and therefore we will receive a full inheritance.) Being adopted gives us the full rights as sons of God because of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Understanding our adoption is another reason to give ourselves back to God so that He can use us for His glory.

We already have the full adoption, the full inheritance, although we have not yet fully realized the actual inheritance (Romans 8:23). Just as we are already seated in the heavenly places, we have also received the inheritance. Unfortunately, there are some who try to strip our inheritance from us and make what is given to us as part of our salvation into something we need to earn. They use verse 14 to make a case that believers need to be trained in being led by the Spirit in order to gain a full inheritance. They take verse 17 and make a distinction between being an heir of God and joint heir with Christ. Those who do not suffer will not become a full son and therefore will not enjoy the full inheritance. However, we are an heir of God because we are His sons. We are joint heirs with Christ because we are fully identified with Him. There is no distinction between the two. Those who are redeemed are the one who HAVE received the adoption of sons (Galatians 4:5—7). The indwelling Holy Spirit is our unconditional guarantee that we are sons of God.

Suffering (verse 17)

There is a sense in which all believers are considered to have suffered because we are identified so closely with Christ. We are said to have died and been buried with Christ. As He suffered, so have we (Romans 6:3—4). There is also suffering that comes to us because we stand up for our faith. Faithful believers are guaranteed to suffer in this world (2 Timothy 3:12). We suffer because the world hates Jesus Christ and we are identified with Him (Matthew 10:22; John 15:18, 25). The Philippians give us an example of believers who suffered because they had a strong faith (Philippians 1:29).

However, Romans 8:17 seems to indicate that those who do not suffer for Christ will not glory in Him. I believe that all believers will suffer to some degree and therefore all will be glorified with Him. I also believe that's not what the verse is saying. The underlying assumption is that the believer will suffer, therefore we will be glorified in Him. Notice that the verse is stating that we suffer IN Him, not for Him or because of Him. This is because all believers will suffer because all believers are in Him. This verse is contrasting the suffering we experience in this life with the glory we will together experience in the next life. The glory is not conditional on the suffering (2 Thessalonians 1:12).

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