

Life in the Spirit

Rom. 8.12-14

Paul begins the next paragraph after speaking of the great life that is ours, to the great debt from which we have been freed.

He includes himself as he says, ‘we are under obligation,’ or better, ‘we are debtors.’

As Americans, we know something about being in debt! When I preached this text to WOPC a year ago, January, our national debt was under 22 trillion dollars. It is now just over 25 trillion.

Do you know how much a trillion dollars is? Do you know how much a trillion is?

Our nation used to have 1000 dollar bills. They have all been taken out of circulation.

To make a million dollars, you need a stack of 1000 dollar bills to 4 inches tall. To make a stack of one billion dollars, you need a stack of 1000 dollar bills the size of a football field – and that includes the endzones.

For a stack of 1000 dollars to make 1 trillion dollars – that is 63 miles! From here to Carlsbad!

You are all debtors! Each of you would have to come up with 72000 dollars to wipe out that debt! Annabelle, do you have 72000 dollars? Aleena?

Anyway – back to Paul – ‘We are debtors – NOT!’ Not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – that is the way of death!

Rather, we are debtors to what, to whom? He doesn’t say it because he just said it in 9-11.

So dear ones, dear brothers, as Paul puts his arms around us all – we are DEBTORS! Isn't it grand!

The trillion dollars is in your favor; you are debtors to the Holy Spirit who has given you life and indwells you; who will raise you from the dead in perfect holiness!

We are debtors to Jesus who paid for you not with gold or silver or 1000 dollar bills, but the money of heaven – his life and sacrificial blood! He is that man in Matthew 18 who owed 10,000 talents – something like 2.2 billion dollars – and the Master pardoned the debt!

And now you are debtors to the Father – as Paul takes us into the rich fields of Sonship; you are not just rich but adopted –so fully live for him!

We are debtors not to the flesh because all who are led by the Spirit, these alone are the sons of God.

But praise be to God that we can take what Paul says in 14, and view all of 12-13 through that lens, as we shall see.

The first point is: You must see, be and live as indebted to the Lord. You are not indebted to the flesh to live after the flesh.

A big part of being led by the Spirit, of being indwelt by him and filled with him and his abiding in you and you in him – is how you see yourself!

To be indebted to the flesh is to live as an unbeliever. It is to accept sin as just another part of your life. Someone has said it is to live with one's horizons bound by a sinful state.

How can a Christian live like that? And Paul has been saying – he can't, and he won't.

The flesh is the complexity of the fallen nature with its sinful desire, drives, affections, purposes and principles. It is to be governed and gripped by such a condition. The Spirit is the opposite.

So much of a comfortable, joyful and peaceful Christian life rides on your minds – how you think about God, His place in your life, and yourself as a sinner redeemed from that old life, that old bondage, that old debt. Paul writes later – *do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...* (Rom 12:2)

This is why being in the dressing room of the Bible is crucial; or suiting up in the locker room of his truth, getting ready to take the field! You see your needs there, and find the Lord's provisions for you; you see the battle ahead and put on the armor of the saints!

This is your obligation, your debt to the Lord; what love, what attention, what *intention* he should have of you!

Remember how Joseph, raised from the prison in Egypt by Potiphar, refused the sexual advances of his master's wife – "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. *How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?*" (Gen 39:9)

God made you a great one by grace! He spared nothing for you and has given you all. Except for sin! God's wife is his beauty of holiness. It is a great evil to transgress his law in the name of grace!

Live as indebted to Christ and the Spirit.

Now – **secondly**, here is the flip side – if you live as one indebted to the flesh to live after the flesh, you are **not** indebted to Christ and the Spirit. Paul says you **are** in the flesh and you **will** die because you are not a Christian. He says it even more strongly: "**You MUST die!**"

This is the life of the one back in 5-8. Even if you say you are a Christian! Remember way back in chapter 2 – a Jew is not one outwardly, but in the heart!

In the mafia movie, The Godfather, you see Michael Corleone standing at the baptismal font, renouncing all sin, then all evil, then all the works of the devil – while all his hitmen are at that very moment murdering the heads of the other gangs!

See here that Paul is not giving a command as much as describing two different lives. This is descriptive rather than prescriptive. He is not saying here – “Christian, if you don’t put more sin to death, you might lose your salvation!” No.

Now should Christians put sin to death? Ye, of course! Paul has said that already in Romans 6. But he is asserting here two very different lives; and the Christian will fight against sin – we must! Not to earn salvation at all, but because we are saved, we will fight!

Those who live according to the old fallen man in Adam, obligated to the world system, will not fight against sin! And you will die – die in the full sense of that word – eternal death, complete separation from God, the second death, everlasting suffering, eternal judgment, unending wrath from the presence of God and Christ.

Your life in Christ has rescued you from that life – if we can call that life! You died once for all in Christ, and are removed from the kingdom of Satan and death. You dwell in Christ and His Kingdom and Spirit.

Are you feeling your debt to Him again? You should! But if you are not – if you believe the gospel is given so you can live for yourself, for sin, for the devil and in the end, go to heaven, look again at this verse; this is the prison door slamming forever on your false hopes and false peace!

Paul puts it most unmistakably in 1 Cor. 6:

⁹ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1Co 6:9-11)

The gospel is too big to be kept inside, in the heart alone. This is why Rom 10 speaks of both belief in the heart and professing with the mouth Jesus is Lord! Something is bad wrong with a faith that does not come from the heart and reach the tongue, the eyes, the hands, and the feet!

But it is just as bad to have a faith that is only on the outside, only external:

²⁵ *"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. ²⁶ "You blind Pharisee, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also. (Mat 23:25-26)*

This brings us to our final point – 1. See yourself, Christian, as indebted fully to the Lord and His Spirit. 2. If you live as one indebted rather to your own self and your own ways, you are not a believer and face eternal cursing.

Now 3rd, as a believer, redeemed, his own, you will live in the fullest sense of that word, if **you are one who BY THE SPIRIT puts to death the deeds of the body.**

The ‘deeds of the body’ refers to the body as the concrete and practical vehicle for godliness or ungodliness. Paul tells us our bodies

are temples, and they are not to be defiled by sin. So we have a fight on our hands – but the good news is that the fight will be successful.

The Christian can give no place to sin. When sin occurs in our lives, as it does every day, our hearts cannot abide it for long. We see sin as an enemy. And even though we sin, and stumble, and fall, and though we can pamper, protect or pacify sin for a season, a Christian cannot long be at peace with his sin. What!? Can we be reconciled with our Father's enemy? Or love what killed our Jesus? Or baby what grieves the Holy Spirit?

Verse 13 is all about the difference between a repentant and an unrepentant life? Either you love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength by the grace of Jesus; or you love yourself with all that is in you, in your pride and lust, for you!

Jesus put it this way: “If you save your life, you will lose it; if you lose your life, in Christ, you will find it.”

And I want to especially emphasize here – since we have preached much back in Romans 6 on putting to death the deeds of the body – that the agency of the Holy Spirit is vital and crucial here. This battle is part of being led by Him. This Spirit shows us the things of Christ. It is he who testifies to our sonship – in part by inspiring our fight against sin.

Paul writes that these and these only, led by the Spirit who indwells them, are the sons of God.

I wish to close on this note of being debtors to the Spirit. Doesn't this mean relying on Him? Looking to His resources in our life rather than our own? What a full wealth we have in him!

As in the OT temple, there are two giant pillars to be set firmly in our souls to live as the temple of the Spirit. That is, as debtors to God, live

daily in the reality of what He has saved you from, and to what He has saved you to.

Think longer and harder on the judgment from which you have been rescued and delivered! You were God's enemies, and we hated him in our flesh, and deserved nothing from his good, loving, almighty and eternal hand but wrath and misery.

The only reason you are not in hell right now is the mercy of Christ Jesus!

Mercy will not treat us as we deserve – He pities the repentant sinner.

Then grace – giving us what we do not deserve!

Not only are we no longer enemies, but we are now welcomed by God! We are known by him, acquainted with him. No, more – he is our master and lord again; and more – he is your friend; and more – he is your dear, dear friend, a best friend; and more! He is your own flesh and blood! Your father, your brother, one in body with you!

This is what binds us to him, and frees us from the foolish self-reliance that is in our bones.

May future and eternal and unbounded and all-perfect indebtedness crowd your narrow little souls, here today, and tomorrow, and the next day, when Jesus comes again.

What a short span in which to be led; like a few toddler steps, and then glory!