

Romans 8:12-17
The Holy Spirit's Ongoing Ministry

This morning we return to our study of the book of Romans

- We took a few weeks off due to the Christmas holidays as well as having Rich and Paula Barnds here with us

Romans is, as we have seen, a tremendous book

- It is filled with theological insight
- It is, without a doubt, one of the most important books of the NT

After discussing the issue of condemnation for three chapters, the apostle Paul switches to announce that there is a way for sinners to be declared righteous in the sight of God

- This is the doctrine of justification by faith alone

Sinners are declared righteous in the sight of God by trusting in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross

- God takes His perfect sacrifice and applies it to condemned sinners
- God takes our sin and applies it to Christ, thereby becoming the Sin-bearer and wrath-bearer

Now that sinners are declared righteous in the sight of God, how does this change their mindset?

- That is the focus of Romans 6-8
- This is where we left off some weeks ago

Romans 6-8 each contain a different emphasis

- Romans 6 focuses on the issue of sin
- Romans 7 focuses on the issue of Law
- Romans 8 focuses on the issue of the Holy Spirit

In Romans 6, we learned that believers

- Have died to sin and are now alive to God
- Are no longer slaves to sin
- Are obligated to reject a lifestyle of sin
- Should use their bodies for God's purposes

In Romans 7, we learned that believers

- Are no longer under the threat and bondage of the Law
- Are joined to Christ
- Still struggle with sin

In Romans 8, we learned that believers

- Have no condemnation since they are in Christ
- Are free from the law of sin and death
- Should live according to the Spirit and not according to the flesh

It is in this 8th chapter of Romans that the Holy Spirit is highlighted

- The believer is to be directed and controlled by the Holy Spirit

We learn more about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the born-again believer

Let's read Romans 8:12-17

Specifically in this passage, we learn four (4) essential ministries of the Holy Spirit toward the believer

- The Holy Spirit strengthens us (to deal with sin) (8:12-13)
- The Holy Spirit leads us (to follow God) (8:14)
- The Holy Spirit invites us (to enjoy intimacy with God) (8:15)
- The Holy Spirit assures us (to trust God's promises) (8:16-17)

I. The Holy Spirit strengthens us (to deal with sin) (8:12-13)

12 So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh –

In light of all that Paul has taught in Romans 6-8 thus far, believers have a very important obligation

- They have a very important responsibility

This obligation pertains to those who are “brethren”

- Those who have been justified
- Those who are being sanctified

As a natural consequence of having died to sin, born-again believers should strive to live a life of obedience

- The life that Christians should not aspire is given in verse 12, “not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh”

The “flesh” stands for all that is worldly, sensual, selfish, and sinful

- It summarizes our previous lives as unbelievers, being enslaved by the things of this world¹
- It stands in opposition to the work of the Holy Spirit

Listen to what Paul writes in Galatians 5, “the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another” (Gal 5:17)

For a born-again believer to choose an intentional lifestyle of worldliness, sensuality, selfishness, and sin is to run totally counter to his nature

- He is to pursue holiness, not sinfulness
- He is to allow the Holy Spirit, not the world, to direct his steps

Paul says that as Christians, we have an obligation to pursue and practice this Spirit-filled lifestyle

- Not to choose the worldly, fleshly one

This should remind us that the Christian life is not a cruise control

- We don't let go and think that God will simply do everything for us

If God didn't hold believers responsible for action, then He would never utter forth a command

- Yet the Scriptures are filled with imperatives, telling us what is required of us

God has not removed believers from the influence of the flesh

- But we are not to “belong” to the arena of the flesh

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *NICNT, Romans*, 494.

13 for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die;

A warning is given here in 13 about those who would continue to live a life of worldiness and sinfulness

- If they continue along such a path, then “you must die”

If a person sets his course toward the things of this world with no turning back, then this individual has reason to doubt the authenticity of his profession

- Unless there is a change of heart and nature, the apostle Paul says that this person will die

The death spoken of here is not merely physical death

- But it is spiritual death
- Being separated from the holy God forever and ever

but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

But believers are those whose direction in life is not according to the flesh

- They live according to the Spirit

This is not to say, however, that believers never struggle with sin

- Romans 7 reminded us that believers are still very susceptible to sin
- The potential for sin is still there

The difference is that believers will repent from their sin

- There will not be an unbroken pattern of sin in their lives

Of course, living a life of obedience doesn't come naturally

- On the contrary, we can't do it on our own

This is why verse 13 reminds Christians of the ministry of the Holy Spirit

- He is the Spirit of power, to enable us to do that which pleases God

It is “**by the Spirit**” that believers should take up the action described in verse 13, “**putting to death the deeds of the body**”

- The Puritans referred to this as mortification
- That's not a word that we use that often

Believers are not to play around with sin

- Believers are to mortify sin in their bodies

In Colossians 3, Paul wrote, “**Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.**” (3:5)

Jesus spoke of radical action that needs to be taken

- If our eye offends us, pluck it out!
- If our hand causes us to sin, cut it off!

The Scottish theologian David Brown wrote, “**If we don't kill sin, it will kill us!**”²

- We must be serious about dealing with sin

² John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Romans 1-8*, 423.

No Christian dares to deal effectively with the sin nature by mere willpower or determination alone³

- The only effective method for dealing with sin is the Holy Spirit and His Divine power

The negative aspect of “putting to death the deeds of the body” is mentioned here in Romans 8

- But the positive aspect is absent

“the deeds of the body” are the spiritual weeds of our Christian life that must be removed

- The weeds must be removed before the fruit of the Spirit can begin to grow⁴

Our goal isn't to pursue love or self-control or patience

- Our goal is to pursue God, and He will cause His fruit to grow in our lives

The strange paradox of verse 13 is that if we are regularly killing sin in our body, then we will live

- That is one of the evidences that we belong to God
- This is one of the greatest assurances that God can give to His children

If we knowingly allow sin in our lives, we shouldn't expect God to give us full assurance and confidence before Him

- If we are knowingly sinning, then God will bring His discipline – not His assurance – to bear upon our lives

Back in Romans 6, Paul told the Roman believers, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts,¹³ and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.” (6:12-13)

Even though Christians are dead to sin, we still must deal with sin on a regular basis

- The apostle uses the present tense “putting to death” to denote ongoing, continuous, repetitive action on the part of the believer

Practically speaking, how do we mortify sin in our bodies?⁵

- Recognize the presence of (and potential for) sin around us
- Have a heart fixed on God
- Meditate on God's Word regularly
- Commune with God in prayer
- Practice obedience to God

Wouldn't it be nice if we could once-for-all put sin to death in our bodies?⁶

- God didn't design sanctification to be that one-time act
- He designed sanctification to be an ongoing, daily, hourly act by which we put sin to death in our bodies

While we have been given the tremendous task of mortifying sin, we can't do it alone

- We are entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit to strengthen us and enable us to accomplish this

I praise God that I am not left to myself to fight against sin

- The Holy Spirit indwells me, enabling me and giving me strength to deal with sin (8:12-13)

³ Everett F. Harrison, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 92.

⁴ Alan F. Johnson, *Everyman's Bible Commentary, Romans*, 148-49.

⁵ MacArthur, 425-26.

⁶ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 312.

But there are other ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer

II. The Holy Spirit leads us (to follow God) (8:14)

14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

A second ministry of the Holy Spirit is given here in verse 14

- That of Him leading us

This is an oftentimes misunderstood element of the Spirit's work in our lives

- The reason why it is so often misunderstood is that it is hard to identify the many ways in which the Spirit does lead us

I think all of us have had times in our lives when we absolutely knew that the Holy Spirit was leading us to do something

- Witness to an unbeliever
- Minister to a believer
- Encourage a Christian

This isn't feeling something in your gut

- This isn't going off of emotions

God the Holy Spirit does lead us and direct us

- But the thought here in verse 14 is more than that of general guidance
- The Holy Spirit should be the controlling influence in the life of the believer⁷

Being led by the Spirit of God goes hand-in-hand with being led by the Scriptures

- The Holy Scriptures are the inspired product and result of the Holy Spirit
- He is their Author

As we fill our minds with the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit can lead us

- So if you are facing a decision and want God's guidance, then you should be in the Word even more than normal!

In Ephesians 5, Paul writes, "**and do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit**"

- The result of being filled with the Spirit is given in the following verses (5:19-21)
 - o "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
 - o singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord;
 - o ²⁰ always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;
 - o ²¹ and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ"

⁷ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary*, 257.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you.”

- What are the results of being filled with the Scriptures? (3:16b-17)
 - o “with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs,
 - o singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
 - o ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father”

Do you see how the results of being filled with the Spirit are the same as being filled with the Scriptures?

- Being Spirit-filled begins with being Scripture-filled

Many people speak of the Spirit-filled life as being mystical and hard to understand

- In reality, it is quite simple
- Immerse yourself into the pages of Scripture!

If we find ourselves being led by the Spirit of God, then Paul would encourage us with these words, “for all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God”

- God does lead His children!

Notice the “all” here in Romans 8:14

- Every single believer is being led by the Holy Spirit⁸

This Divine leading is available for all who are born-again

- For every justified believer

Rest assured, dear friend, that the Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something contrary to Scripture

- The Holy Spirit always leads in accordance with His Word

So again, the more we read the Word of God, the better we will be equipped to know God’s leading

Thus far, we have looked at two ministries of the Holy Spirit

- He strengthens us (to deal with sin) (8:12-13)
- He leads us (to follow God) (8:14)

III. The Holy Spirit invites us (to enjoy intimacy with God) (8:15)

15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again.

Lest the Holy Spirit be misunderstood further, the apostle Paul describes just how He operates in the life of a believer

The first part of verse 15 informs us, “for you have not received a spirit of slavery”

- Having this type of a spirit or attitude is not the Divine design of the Christian life
- Believers should not live with a fearful, slavish attitude toward God

⁸ Hendriksen, 256.

Paul knew that there were hundreds of thousands of slaves in the city of Rome

- Many of those slaves lived in constant fear of their masters
 - o Fear of punishment
 - o Fear of death
 - o Fear of being separated from their families

The obedience rendered by these slaves toward their masters was one of guilt and fear

- It was not rendered out of true motives

Here in verse 15, Paul unmasks the fearful bondage that characterized these believers prior to their conversion

- The apostle shows them an entirely different manner of motivation for service

Romans 8:15 is very similar to what Paul wrote to young Timothy, “For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.” (2 Tim 2:7)

- Believers aren’t given a spirit or attitude of timidity and fear
- We are given the Spirit of power, love, and discipline

If the Holy Spirit was a spirit of slavery, then it would lead “to fear again”

- Notice the use of “again”

Fear is the absence of true, Biblical hope

- Fear causes us to become enslaved and ensnared by earthly powers

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” (1 John 4:18)

- Earthly fear is provoked by inferiority and unbiblical thinking

The only One we should fear is the Lord Himself

- To fear Him is the beginning of knowledge (Prov 1:7)

but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons

But the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of slavery

- He does not lead us into further bondage

Rather, the Holy Spirit leads us away from bondage

- He gives us true liberty and freedom!
- He gives us confidence!

Here in verse 15, we are told that He is the “spirit of adoption”

- In most of your versions, “spirit” is capitalized

The concept of adoption was very rare in the OT in the nation of Israel

- It was fairly common in Rome

When a child was adopted in the Roman culture, he/she immediately became a part of the new family

- He/she was also severed from the previous family

The adopted child was given full rights and responsibilities within the new family

- There was no second-class citizenship

What a concept Paul uses to describe the change in status for those of us who are born-again believers

- We are adopted into the family of God!

Romans has taught us that as sinners, we are not naturally born into the family of God

- As Jesus told Nicodemus, one must be born again
- This is the second birth – a spiritual birth!

In a totally awesome change of nature, condemned sinners are adopted into the family of God!

- This is simply unthinkable!

A family doesn't have to adopt

- It is a matter of choice

In Ephesians 1, we are told that it was God's choice – not necessity – that caused Him to adopt us

- **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love⁵ He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”** (Eph 1:3-6, emphasis mine)

There was nothing lovely about us that merited God's choosing us

- Rather, we were wretched, sinful, condemned, and deserving of God's wrath

But God's gracious choice of us actually highlights and magnifies His grace

- He receives greater glory in our lives!

by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

As adopted sons of God, we can cry out, **“Abba! Father!”**

- He is our heavenly Father

“Abba” was the Aramaic term for “father”

- It was a term of intimacy and tenderness
- It was oftentimes the word a small child used of his father

Most of the young children here at CBC don't say, “Father”

- They say, “Daddy”

“Father” seems very proper

- “Daddy” seems very personal

In the synagogue, the Jews did not use the word **“Abba”** to refer to God⁹

- They would use another Greek word for “Father”

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale NT Commentaries, Romans*, 157.

Most of the time, the Jews would say something like, “Father in heaven” to avoid the thought of being presumptuous in addressing God¹⁰

- They didn’t think of God as an intimate Father
- They thought of Him as a demanding and exacting Judge

Martin Luther wrote this about this aspect of God as our Abba Father

- “Although I be oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seem to be forsaken and utterly cast away from thy presence, yet am I thy child, and thou art my Father for Christ’s sake: I am beloved because of the Beloved.”¹¹

No matter what happens in this earthly life, believers are assured that God is their Abba!

“Abba” is only used 3 times in the entire NT

- Here in Romans 8
- Paul uses it again in Galatians 4

But the most unusual occurrence is found in Mark 14:36

- Jesus is in the Garden of Gethsemane

The time that He prayed, He said, “Abba! Father!”

- He used the tender, intimate Aramaic term, as well as the normal Greek term

In a moment of tremendous agony, the Christ referred to His heavenly Father as “Abba”

- A term of tremendous intimacy
- A term of tremendous tenderness

The reality is that because we are adopted into the family of God, we can also refer to God as “Abba”

- We can refer to Him by this intimate term

Here in verse 15, Paul is saying that Christians need not be so concerned with formal names and terms for God

- We can draw near like a little child and refer to Him as “Abba”
- Daddy!

On numerous occasions in the Gospels, Jesus allowed little children to come to Him

- “Let the children alone, and do not hinder them from coming to Me; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (Mt 19:14)

We are to be like little children, drawing close to our heavenly Father

- The opposite approach is to fear God and stay away from Him

This is precisely what Paul is writing here in this verse

- We are not to dread coming to God, as if He is always frowning upon us
- We are to draw near to Him, realizing that He is a God of grace and love

We need to ensure that we think Biblically on this matter

- God has poured out His wrath on His Son for us
- We will never face God’s wrath

¹⁰ Morris, 316.

¹¹ Moo, 503.

The Holy Spirit helps to make this truth more of a reality in our lives

- The Holy Spirit strengthens us (to deal with sin) (8:12-13)
- The Holy Spirit leads us (to follow God) (8:14)
- The Holy Spirit invites us (to enjoy intimacy with God) (8:15)

IV. The Holy Spirit assures us (to trust God's promises) (8:16-17)

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

At times, many Christians struggle with assurance of salvation

- "How do I know that I am saved?"

We could answer that question a number of ways

- But let's examine the manner in which Paul deals with this question

The Holy Spirit – being God Himself – actually bears witness with our spirit that we belong to Him

- Isn't this remarkable?

Again, God doesn't leave us to ourselves, by ourselves

- He seals us with the Holy Spirit Who permanently and eternally indwells the believer
- The Holy Spirit constantly bears witness with our spirit that we are His children

The amazing reality is that the Holy Spirit does not base His assuring ministry on how well we live the Christian life

- Rather, He calls us to look away from ourselves, fixing our hope, focus, and attention on the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross¹²

The Spirit bears witness that we are "children of God"

- This is a different term than "sons" in verse 14

"sons" is a male term

- "children" includes both males and females

17 and if children, heirs also.

We have already studied many of the consequences of being God's children

- Never suffering God's wrath
- Being justified by faith alone
- Having peace with God

Here in verse 17, the apostle lists another remarkable consequence of being in God's family

- That of receiving an inheritance

Some of you may have received an inheritance from a family member or friend

- Perhaps it was money
- Perhaps it was stock, land, a house, or other treasured possessions

¹² Harrison, 93.

We pass on an inheritance to those who we love

- We wouldn't pass on an inheritance to an enemy, would we?

As we contemplate on the Gospel, we should be amazed that God will give us an inheritance

- Despite the fact that we were formally His enemies
- We were totally undeserving of His grace, love, and mercy

But the apostle Paul assures us that because we are God's children, we are "heirs also"

- We are assured of a future inheritance

We are called "children"

- A slightly different term than "sons of God"

We are in the family of God

- No longer enemies
- No longer slaves

heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,

But we aren't just "heirs"

- We are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"

An inheritance is only available if someone plans it beforehand

- The inheritance must be handed down

In this case, we are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"

- All the silver and the gold belong to Him
- He owns the cattle on a thousand hills
- His riches cannot be measured!

The apostle Peter tells us that our inheritance is "imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:4)

- "imperishable" – not perishable items like land, money, gold, or jewelry
- "undefiled" – not subject to corruption or sin
- "reserved in heaven for you" – not subject to the deflation of the economy!

This future inheritance is already promised to us!

- We are assured of its reality!

Not only is God the Source of our inheritance

- But you could also say that God is our inheritance!¹³

"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I have hope in Him" (Lam 3:24)

If you search the Scriptures, you will find that no angel is referred to as an heir of God¹⁴

- Neither can an animal or the Earth claim to be an heir of God

¹³ MacArthur, 444.

¹⁴ William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse-by-Verse*, 315.

if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

Another way in which we are assured that we belong to Christ is through the avenue of suffering

Paul is not saying that our suffering somehow adds to the redemptive suffering that Christ endured¹⁵

- Christ's work on the cross was sufficient to atone for the sins of all those who would believe in Him
- We can add nothing to His work

But the reality is that if we love something, we will be willing to sacrifice and suffer for it

- The same applies to our relationship with Christ

When we think of suffering and persecution, we oftentimes think of being tortured or put to death

- That is certainly an extreme form of suffering

But consider these other ways in which we could suffer

- Losing a job because of taking a stand on a Christian value
- Terminating a relationship because it is causing you to sin
- Forfeiting a business venture because it would involve cheating
- Honoring the Lord in the classroom by choosing not to cheat

All of these are forms of suffering

- All of these are ways in which we can show our love for the Savior

When Christ confronted Saul about his persecution of the Church, do you remember what He said?

- **“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”** (Acts 9:4, emphasis mine)

Any attack against the Church is an attack against Christ

- He fully identifies with her suffering

“And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12)

- There are no exceptions for us as believers!

The path to glory has always been paved with suffering

- There is no crown without a cross
- Sanctification before glorification

Are you being led by the Spirit of God?

- Is the Holy Spirit the dominating and controlling influence of your life?
- Or are you still governed and guided by the flesh and the things of this world?

If you are still fleshly, then you must die

- You must die to self
- You must die to sin

Look to the Lord Jesus Christ and be rescued from eternal damnation!

- **“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord”** (Rom 6:23)

¹⁵ Hendriksen, 263.