

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #30

Romans 8:12-17

What we have seen in this chapter is that at the moment we believe on Jesus Christ we receive the Holy Spirit and that Spirit sets us free from the law, from sin, from death and from condemnation. God's Spirit so links us to Jesus Christ that God no longer sees us as one who lives "according to the flesh," but as one who lives "according to the Spirit."

God's Spirit has positionally changed our status with God forever. We cannot ever receive the condemnation of God. However, God does not desire that this indwelling Holy Spirit be a practical waste and neither did Paul. So in these verses he writes to drive home this point:

IN VIEW OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GRACE-WORK IN US AND FOR US, WE ARE OBLIGATED NOT TO LIVE AFTER THE FLESH.

Now there are three very practical observations I want to make here:

- 1) No good thing is in us until the Holy Spirit indwells us and then the potential for good or bad in regard to pleasing God becomes a possibility.
- 2) We owe a great debt to God for all He has done, but we cannot ever repay Him for what He has done for us.
- 3) Our obligation is not to God here, it is to our flesh. We have an obligation to our flesh which the Holy Spirit actually enables us to meet. Our obligation to our flesh is not to continually live according to the flesh.

As we come to **verse 12** there are three critical grammatical matters we don't want to miss:

- 1) The verb "we are" is present tense meaning we have a continual obligation.
- 2) The noun "obligation" refers to a duty or obligation which we owe because of favors which we have received.
- 3) The participle "not living" is present tense, meaning a continual or habitual action.

Here is the point - In view of how God has favored us by graciously giving us His Spirit, we have a continual obligation not to be continually living according to the flesh. This does not mean there will not be moments of failure, but we have the responsibility to see that those moments of failure do not become our habitual or continual pattern of life. We have an obligation to see to it that our flesh does not continually control the way we live. The antithesis of this is that we have an obligation to see to it that the Holy Spirit is who continually controls our pattern of life.

Paul presents three reasons why we should not allow our flesh to dominate our life:

REASON #1 – Because continually living according to the flesh is to live a life that is continually dead. **8:13a**

Naturally the question that first pops into the mind here is what death is Paul referring to? Well, we know from **Romans 8:1** that he is not talking about eternal death or damnation because once one has the Spirit of God he cannot ever receive any condemnation from God.

It is certainly possible that Paul is referring to a life that is spiritually dead. If the believer continually lives life after the flesh, he will not have a vibrant spiritual life that is used by God or developed by God.

It is certainly possible that Paul is referring to physical death. If a believer were to continually allow his flesh to govern his life, God may take the believer physically home. This is certainly consistent with what Paul wrote to the Corinthians (I Cor. 11:29-30).

If we choose to live our lives as a believer according to our flesh, we will have a spiritual life that is dead and doesn't do anything for God, and then we will physically die having done nothing.

REASON #2 – Because continually living according to the Spirit is to live a life that is continually alive. **8:13b**

The conjunction “but” introduces a sharp contrast with living life “according to the flesh.” For the believer, there is another way to live life and that is “according to the Spirit.” **Do not miss this point; our flesh or body is put to death “by the Spirit,” not by ourselves.**

When we are continually living our lives yielded to the Holy Spirit, two things are operative:

- 1) Fleshly things are less and less evident.
- 2) Spiritual things are more and more evident.

Now carefully observe that the “deeds of the body” must be continually put to death because the flesh-body continually cries out, gratify me, pleasure me, fulfill me.

Also notice from this verse that a holy life must have a controlled body. As William Newell said, “A holy life without a controlled body is an absolute contradiction, not to be dreamed of for a moment” (*Romans*, p. 309).

J. Vernon McGee said concerning this verse: “Let’s be practical now. What is your problem today? Liquor? Drugs? Sex? You may say, “I don’t have those problems.” Then how about your thought-life? How about your tongue? Do you gossip? Do you tell the truth? Whatever your problem is, why don’t you confess it to God, then turn it over to the Holy Spirit? My friend, if you deal with it in reality, you won’t need to crawl up on the psychiatrist’s couch. He won’t help you. He can shift your guilt complex to another area, but he can’t get rid of it. Only Christ can remove it; He is in that business” (*Romans*, Vol. 4, p. 700).

REASON #3 – Because continually living according to the Spirit is to live a life with a continual demonstration of sonship. **8:14-17**

The major thrust of this section is that when a believer lives a godly, spiritual life, he continually demonstrates his family heritage, that he is a child of God.

Now carefully notice the family terminology in these verses:

- 1) “ Sons of God” (**8:14**) - This refers to the fact that they have been born again and are in God’s family by virtue of a spiritual birth.
- 2) “ adoption as sons” (**8:15**) - This refers to the fact that God’s children have all privileges of sonship, including future inheritance. We are born sinners, alienated from God, therefore our sonship may clearly be understood in terms of adoption.
- 3) “ children of God” (**8:16**) - This refers to the fact that we have been born into God’s family.
- 4) “ heirs ” (**8:17**) - This refers to the fact that as God’s children we have a legal right to inherit everything which belongs to a child of God.

Paul’s point here is that when a believer is allowing his flesh to dominate his life, he is not demonstrating his sonship. However, when he is allowing God’s Spirit to dominate his life, he is demonstrating his sonship.

Now the key to all of this is found in **verse 14**. The person who is “being led by the Spirit of God” is the one who continually demonstrates he is a child of God.

A logical question is this - “What does it mean to be led by the Spirit of God?” According to Christ’s teachings in John 16:13-15, it means to be led in a direction of God’s revealed truth. In other words, to allow ourselves to believe the truth of God and obey the truth of God is to be led by the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God will always lead the believer to the truth of God. So the more we know of the Word of God, the more we may be led by the Spirit of God, and determine whether or not we are led of God’s Spirit.

Now in **verses 15-17**, Paul gives three explanatory evidences that we are being led by the Spirit of God indicated by the explanatory conjunction “ for ” which begins **verse 15**:

Evidence #1 - The leading of the Spirit of God is evidenced by our attitude toward God.
8:15

If we are being led of God’s Spirit, we will have a powerful sense that God is our Heavenly Father. We will not view our relationship with God as slavery, nor will we be bound by some fear that we will face His condemnation. If we are being led of the Spirit of God we will truly have a sense of our sonship - that God is our Heavenly Father.

The Spirit of God will continually allow us to realize that we have all rights and privileges of sonship. In fact, this Spirit causes us to cry out, “Abba! Father!” The word “Abba” comes from an Aramaic root which translated in Hebrew “Av” which means Father. This term was used by Jesus Christ in Gethsemane when He prayed (Mark 14:36). **The major emphasis of the word “Abba, Father” is an intense realization that God is our Heavenly Father and we are a child of the living God. The Holy Spirit puts the believer in a similar relationship with God the Father that Jesus Christ, God the Son had.**

Evidence #2 - The leading of the Spirit of God is evidenced by our assurance of salvation.
8:16

If we are being led by the Spirit of God, there will be an internal sense that we are truly saved (II Cor. 13:5). The Spirit of God gives us a legal witness of the validity of our salvation. The verb “bears witness” is an emphatic legal term. It means to emphatically testify. The Spirit of God will continually and emphatically testify that we are a true child of God when we are not being controlled by the flesh.

There is a book in the N.T. which is great for assurance of salvation - I John. In fact, in I John 3:24 there is a distinct connection between Spirit leading and assurance. The verb “know” shows up over 25 times, so John clearly had assurance in mind.

In this book there are at least five Spirit-led signs to look for in our assurance of salvation:

- 1) A recognition of the Holiness of God. I John 1:5
- 2) A recognition of the sinfulness of ourselves. I John 1:8
- 3) A desire to obey the Word of God. I John 2:3-4
- 4) A love for the people of God. I John 3:14; 5:3
- 5) A desire to study the Word of God. I John 5:13

Evidence #3 - The leading of the Spirit of God is evidenced by our suffering for God’s glory.
8:17

Paul wanted believers to realize that we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Jesus Christ. Everything Christ has and is, we too will share, including His suffering. Suffering is part of a Spirit -led process which will culminate when we leave this world and go to glory. We have a legal claim to all things of God - this includes suffering, but it also includes glory. Jesus Christ had to suffer, and according to Hebrews 5:8-9, one reason why was because trials and suffering are part of a process which God ordains through His Spirit in order to prepare us for His eternal glory. It seems that all suffering is part of that which prepares us for glory.

In view of the fact we have God’s Spirit in us and we have all of these great blessings as God’s child, we are obligated not to live after the flesh but after the Spirit. This week let the Spirit of God control you and you will reflect your eternal sonship.