

Romans 8:12-17 – “Debtors and Heirs”

(Pew Bible Page: 944)

Intro: We have seen marvelous things in these chapters of Romans, and those marvels come, in a sense, to their climax in the first eleven verses of Romans eight. In those verses we learn three things: 1) There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because God’s grace has resolved the problem of our unrighteousness. 2) There are two contrasting ways of life, life in the flesh and life in the Spirit. One leads to death, the other to life. 3) All who have the Spirit will be raised with Christ in the “now” and the “not yet.” The essential thing we have been taught from Romans 5:1 through 8:11 is this: Everything depends on our being “in Christ.” “In Christ,” we receive all we need for life, godliness, and ultimate salvation. Having established that our future is secure, the Apostle now turns his attention to the subject of Sanctification, a theme only peripherally hinted at in these chapters to this point. The question he deals with in these verses is not, “How can I be saved,” but rather, “How should I live now that I am saved?” Tonight, he will show us that...

Proposition: Because we are saved, it is our duty to put to death the deeds of the flesh through the power of the indwelling Spirit.

Billboard: (vv.12-15) We are Debtors
 (vv.16-17) We are Heirs

(vv.12-15) We are Debtors – Having established the fact of our salvation, Paul now turned his attention to the “So what?” What does the fact of our salvation mean for our daily lives? How should it impact the way we live? In these verses, we are told that we have an obligation to live in a new way, not *for* our salvation but *because* of our salvation: **Romans 8:12–15** - **12** *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13* *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14* *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15* *For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.”* In verse **12**, we are told that we are “debtors,” that we owe something to someone. The concept is one of *obligation*. God has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. How, then, ought we to respond? How should we live in the light of the grace we have received? We are told clearly, we are not obligated to live according to the flesh, the old Sin nature, any longer. We have been released from Sin’s dominion. We are no longer under its reign but are now under the reign of Grace. The unspoken corollary is this: Our obligation is no longer to the flesh but is now to the Spirit. We are *obligated* to live by the Spirit’s direction and in His power. It is worthwhile to note that this verse removes all doubt that believers are still living in the presence of indwelling Sin. Sin is not eradicated when one comes to Christ, but continues to challenge us, though its right to reign in us has been ended by God’s grace. Verse **13** points out the certainty of two different outcomes of each way of life: Anyone who continues to live under Sin’s reign will die eternally. On the other hand, all who submit to the reign of the Spirit, mortifying the flesh (“*put to death the deeds of the body*”) will live, spiritually. Obviously, this verse points out that there is no real choice between these alternatives for one who is genuinely saved. The verse points us to our DUTY as those who have been saved: We are to “mortify the flesh.” Sanctification involves, then, two aspects: The Spirit indwells the believer, providing guidance and help in his battle against the flesh. But the believer has a responsibility

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as well. We are obligated – we have a duty – to put to death, by the Spirit’s power, the deeds of the flesh. We are called to join the Spirit’s battle against our old Sin nature. And this will happen in all who have received the Spirit, as verse **14** makes clear. It is impossible for anyone without the indwelling presence of the Spirit to mortify the flesh’s desires and triumph over Sin’s power. But, when we are putting to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, we are confirmed beyond doubt as sons of God. **Romans 8:14 - 14** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these ARE sons of God* (emphasis mine). Notice the emphasis here: The Spirit *leads* all who belong to Christ. The Spirit reigns in the lives of all in whom He indwells. It is His living presence that assures us, ultimately, that we are Christ’s. Verse **15** helps us further understand: The Spirit’s reign in the believer’s life is not by *compulsion*, as is the reign of Sin in an unbeliever’s life but is rather by *persuasion*. We are no longer SLAVES but now are SONS. We are no longer driven by FEAR but now are motivated by LOVE for our gracious Father, to whom we cry out in familial intimacy.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] As believers we have a duty to put to death the deeds of the flesh with the help of the indwelling Spirit.

[ILLUSTRATION] “In 1940 Shelby Foote joined the Mississippi National Guard and was commissioned as captain of artillery. After being transferred from one stateside base to another, his battalion was deployed to Northern Ireland in 1943. The following year, Foote was charged with falsifying a government document relating to the check-in of a motor pool vehicle he had borrowed to visit a girlfriend in Belfast, Teresa Lavery—later his first wife—who lived two miles beyond the official military limits. He was court-martialed and dismissed from the army.” This may seem like a minor infraction but, dereliction of duty is no small offense as far as the army is concerned. “Dereliction of duty is a specific offense under United States Code and applies to all branches of the US military. A service member who is derelict has willfully refused to perform his duties or has incapacitated himself in such a way that he cannot perform his duties. Such incapacitation includes the person falling asleep while on duty requiring wakefulness, his getting drunk or otherwise intoxicated and consequently being unable to perform his duties, shooting himself and thus being unable to perform any duty, or his vacating his post contrary to regulations.”¹

[APPLICATION] A believer who takes Sin lightly is derelict of duty; absent without leave; AWOL. Anyone who mistakenly diminishes the serious nature of Sin in the life of a believer needs to hear that mortification of sin is not optional – it is our duty in light of all Jesus suffered to save us from Sin’s power. When a believer fails to fight against Sin’s deceitfulness, he disrespects His Lord, damages the testimony of Christ’s church, and incapacitates himself for service to the King. Sin is serious business. Our ultimate salvation is secure because of God’s grace but being diligent to put to death the deeds of the flesh is the least we can do to say, “thank you,” to our gracious Savior and to seriously pursue sanctification.

¹ Wikipedia & Other Internet Sources.

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(vv.16-17) We are Heirs – We are told here that the presence and power of the Spirit in our lives gives comfort to our human spirit that we are indeed God’s adopted sons and daughters, and if His children, then heirs of God. **Romans 8:16–17 - 16** *The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.* Verse **16** is important because it speaks to us of an inner witness, unobservable by anyone but the believer. The Spirit of God causes our human spirit to yearn for God; to seek to be obedient; to get back on our spiritual feet when we stumble; to rejoice in the company of our fellow believers; to hunger for God’s Word. We could go on, but here’s the thing: the desires of our heart change after becoming a Christian, and that is the work of the Spirit alone. The Spirit bears witness as well by giving us power to overcome temptations and endure trials we never could have surmounted when we were still in our sins. The Spirit confirms His presence in us as well by opening our minds to understand God’s Word in a way not possible for us while we were still “in Adam.” The point is this: The presence of the indwelling Spirit of God in our hearts after we come to Christ authenticates beyond all doubt that we belong to Christ. Now verse **17** points to the astonishing conclusion to this truth: If we are children of God, then it follows that we are heirs of God, and will inherit without question all the promises He has made to His Son, Jesus. We are “*joint heirs with Christ.*” None of which will keep us from suffering in this world, as He did; neither will it keep us from being glorified in eternity as He is. “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!”

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Brothers and sisters, now are we the children of God, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

[ILLUSTRATION] Let’s encourage our hearts with an additional affirmation of this truth: **1 John 3:2–3 - 2** *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. 3* *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.* Notice how the apostle John follows the same line of reasoning Paul uses: We are God’s children by God’s grace, so we should purify ourselves by mortifying the deeds of the flesh.

[APPLICATION] Frankly, this calls for celebration. God in grace has not only saved us – He has made us His heirs! Joint heirs with Jesus for all eternity. How great is God’s grace? How deep is His love? How marvelous and past understanding His ways!

Conclusion: Let’s let E. F. Harrison give us a closing word of encouragement: “A comparison of vv. 15 and 16 will bring out an important truth concerning the assurance of salvation. All too often a believer may come to the point of doubting his salvation because his sanctification has proceeded so slowly and so lamely. The Spirit, however, does not base his assuring testimony on progress or the lack of it in the Christian life. He does not lead us to cry, ‘I am God’s child.’ Rather, he leads us to call upon God as Father, to look away from ourselves to him who established the relationship.”²

² Harrison, E. F. (1976). [Romans](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans through Galatians* (Vol. 10, p. 93). Zondervan Publishing House.

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