

Romans: The Good News of God

Children of God

Romans 8:12-17

Rev. Freddy Fritz

October 5, 2008

Children of God

Scripture

The first verse of the greatest chapter in the Bible—Romans 8:1—says, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” Everything else that follows in the rest of Romans 8 tells us why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The first reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because there is no condemnation from the law. That is what the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 8:1-4.

The second reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because we have been delivered from the flesh. That is what the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 8:5-11.

The third reason why there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because we are now the children of God. That is what the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 8:12-17.

Let’s read Romans 8:12-17:

¹² So then, brothers, 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 all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” 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 fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:12-17)

Introduction

February 25, 1992 is the day we finalized the adoption of

Jon, my son. For many months prior to that day we lived with tremendous uncertainty wondering whether or not we would be able to keep Jon. But, finally, after months of uncertainty and waiting, the judge declared Jon to be our legally adopted son, with all of the rights and privileges that pertain to that status. We no longer had to worry about any legal judgments that might go against Jon.

Similarly, when God adopts us into his family, there are no longer any judgments against us. That is what Paul means when he says that there is “therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). There are no judgments against us for a number of reasons, one of which is that we are now the children of God.

Lesson

How do we know that we are the children of God? Paul gives us five reasons in Romans 8:12-17 why we are the children of God.

I. We Do Not Live Like Non-Christians (8:12)

First, we are the children of God because we do not live like non-Christians. Paul says in verse 12, **“So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.”**

In our previous study Paul made it clear that the **“flesh”** or **“sinful nature”** (as some translations have it) refers to a non-Christian. Paul is saying that in light of all that God has done for you by justifying and sanctifying you by the work of the Holy Spirit, you now no longer live like a non-Christian.

But Paul’s point is actually stronger than that. Paul’s point is that **we are debtors** not to live the way a non-Christian lives, but to live a different way.

It’s the work of God that has given us this new life, and, therefore, we ought not to live for the flesh or for its goals. **We are debtors** to God not to live according to the principles and aims of

a corrupt and fallen human nature.

We often say that the great motive of the Christian life is *gratitude*. In other words, we don't obey in order for God to love us. We obey because God has loved us savingly in Jesus Christ. It is God's initiative and love that has provoked our response and obedience. And that, of course, is entirely true.

But the New Testament makes it clear that there are in fact a *number* of motivations for living the Christian life. And Paul is bringing our attention to one of those motivations right here. He's not bringing before us a motivation of *gratitude*; he's actually bringing before us a motivation of *obligation*. Do you see that?

I like the way one translator put it: "Such is the hope that believers have that it lays them under obligation to live as men claimed for that destiny of glory."

So Paul is telling us that we are children of God because we do not live like non-Christians.

II. We Kill Sin (8:13)

Second, we are the children of God because we kill sin. Paul says in verse 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.**"

Now listen to this closely because it's a little paradoxical. Paul says in verse 13 that sinful living is always inseparably linked to death. But he also says that putting sin to death is inseparably linked to life.

Now that's interesting, isn't it? Sinful living leads to death, but putting sin to death always leads to life. It's paradoxical.

But Paul is pressing it home. He's indicating that the Christian is always at work in sanctification. The very phrase, "**you put to death the deeds of the body,**" indicates that.

The indicatives of grace never produce passivity in the true believer. But rather, they produce a strong, grace-dependent, faithful activity on the part of the believer.

Paul is announcing a fundamental reality. It's a law of God's universe. **"Live according to the flesh,"** he says, and **"you will die."** On the other hand, **"Put to death the deeds of the body, [and] you will live."**

Paul is emphasizing not just sanctification in general but *mortification*. Mortification is "putting sin to death." Paul is seeing mortification as a sign that we are children of God. Mortification is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working in us to make us what God intends us to be.

But, even in this verse with its emphasis on our activity and mortification, how do **you put to death the deeds of the body?** Paul says that it is **by the Spirit**. It is not me versus the flesh. It is the Spirit versus the sinful nature, and I am drawing on the power of the Spirit as I war against the flesh.

Look at each of the phrases in this verse, and let's consider what Paul is saying. When he says, **"put to death,"** he is indicating our responsible activity.

When he says, **"put to death the deeds of the body,"** he doesn't mean just physical sins. He means those practices which characterize the flesh, and which are often expressed in a physical way. Paul is saying, "Put to death all the characteristic practices of the flesh."

When he says, **"by the Spirit,"** he's reminding you that mortification, that killing sin, that warring against sin is something that flows from the resources and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

And when he says, **"you will live,"** at the end of verse 13, he's referring to that fullness of eternal life that Christians enjoy in fellowship with God.

Now Paul's point in this verse is not works-salvation. Nor is it even works-sanctification. He is, however, pointing out the unbreakable connection between sinful living and death, and mortification of sin and life. Sin kills, and putting sin to death brings life.

So, we are children of God because we kill sin.

III. We Are Led by the Spirit (8:14)

Third, we are the children of God because we are led by the Spirit. Paul says in verse 14, **“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”**

How do you know that you are a child of God? Because you are led by the Spirit of God. Or, to put it differently, you are a child of God because the Spirit is working in you for sanctification. Your growth in grace is an evidence that you are a child of God.

This verse provides an explanation for the basis of the Christian’s confidence mentioned in the last words of verse 13. You remember, Paul says, “but *if* by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

How will you live? Paul says that you will live, **“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”**

Now, what does being **“led by the Spirit”** mean? Does the Spirit lead only super-Christians? Does he lead those who have reached an entirely different plain than the rest of us mere mortals?

No, Paul is speaking about something that is characteristic of *all* Christians. All Christians are led by the Spirit of God.

Nor is he speaking about something that is merely momentary. He’s not saying that in a moment of real trial and inspiration the Christian is really led by the Spirit.

No, he’s talking about something that is the normal situation for every Christian in every aspect of life.

So what does Paul mean when he says that we are led by the Spirit? Well, it means a lot of things, and we don’t even have time to answer that question fully. But let me suggest five things that are involved in being led by the Spirit.

First, those who are led by the Spirit are governed by the Spirit constantly. Paul is not saying that you were up against a particular trial and that the Spirit just took over at that point. Now you may feel like that at times, and the Lord may help in extraordinary ways, but that’s not what Paul is talking about here.

Paul is talking about you constantly, every moment of every

day, being governed by the Holy Spirit. You notice this even in the language he uses. We are being **“led by the Spirit.”** The Spirit is not a guide that is with you for five minutes, then drops off the trail for several days, then comes back and meets you again for another five minutes, and then drops off the trail for a few days. He’s there with you every step. He’s constantly leading you.

Second, those who are led by the Spirit are primarily corrected and not protected. Paul gives no indication whatsoever that the Holy Spirit protects us from suffering in this passage. In fact, he tells us just the opposite.

The final words of this section indicate that just because you are led by the Spirit does not mean that you are not going to go through trials. On the contrary, if you are a true child of God, Paul says that you will go through trials.

So, the Spirit’s leading here primarily is in correcting us. He’s knocking off rough edges. He’s making us more like Christ.

Third, those who are led by the Spirit are empowered by him. The Holy Spirit does not merely guide us. He empowers us. The Holy Spirit is not like a guide who takes you across the mountains through the treacherous passes because he knows the way. He doesn’t just have information that you need, but he is actually the force that keeps you going. He’s the one who gives you the energy to start the trail in the first place, and to finish it just as surely. So he is empowering you from within.

Fourth, those who are led by the Spirit are transformed by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit doesn’t come in and replace some part of you. He comes in to transform and change you.

It’s truly you who are growing in grace. It’s truly you who are following in the way of the Spirit. And the Spirit is encouraging you and transforming you and helping you in that. He is not displacing your personality.

And finally, those who are led by the Spirit are led in the way of truth. The Holy Spirit always leads us in the way of truth. How many times have you had Christians come to you and say, “You know, the Spirit is leading me to do ‘X’”?

And you scratch your head thinking, “That’s wrong. What you’re saying that you’re being led to do is wrong.”

The Holy Spirit never leads against the Word of God. He never leads against the will of God. He never leads against the truth of God. He always leads with them.

Now I could say a lot more about the Holy Spirit. Indeed, I’ve only scratched the surface on this subject of his leading. But I want you to notice something else here.

Paul is saying that being led by the Spirit is the invariable expression of your sonship. Those who are the children of God are led by the Spirit and are growing in grace, and those always go together. The purpose of the Holy Spirit in making us children of God is to make us like Christ.

That’s what the Holy Spirit is doing in us. The reason we know that we are the children of God is because we are led by the Spirit of God. And the Spirit of God is at work changing us so that we are more like Christ.

IV. We Are Adopted by God (8:15)

Fourth, we are the children of God because we are adopted by God. Paul says in verse 15, **“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”**

Adoption was a much more customary legal procedure in Roman society than in Greek or Hebrew society. Paul was a Roman citizen, and so he was familiar with the adoption procedure.

Adoption usually occurred when a wealthy Roman citizen wanted to grant his inheritance to someone. He may have been without an heir, although it was not uncommon for the Roman to want someone other than his own natural son to receive his inheritance. So, he would then adopt someone as an heir to his entire inheritance. The person being adopted could be a child, but a teenager or even a young adult could be adopted too.

The process of adoption involved a formal, legal process.

There had to be seven witnesses to the adoption.

The moment the adoption occurred several things were immediately true of the new son, particularly if he was older. First, he got a new name and was instantly the heir of all that his new father had. Second, all of his legal obligations and debts were cancelled. Third, the new father now become instantly liable for all of the adopted son's actions—his crimes, debts, and so on. And fourth, the new son now had an obligation to honor and please his new father.

All of this is in Paul's mind when he says that **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons**. The moment God justified you so that there is now no condemnation for you because you are in Christ Jesus, you were adopted into God's family. Several things happened to you. First, you got a new name—Christian—and you were instantly the heir of all that your heavenly Father has. Second, all your legal obligations and debts to the flesh were cancelled. Third, your Father in heaven is liable for your actions now. And finally, you have an obligation to honor and please your Father.

Now, I should mention in passing that Paul is not addressing only males. Christian women should not chafe by being called "sons," any more than Christian men should chafe when called "brides" (in Ephesians 5). We are all sons and we are all brides. Each metaphor tells us something about our relationship with Christ.

Therefore, we know that we are the children of God because we are adopted by God into his family.

V. We Are Assured by the Spirit (8:16-17)

Finally, we are the children of God because we are assured by the Spirit that we are children of God. Paul says in verses 16-17: **"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in**

order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Paul makes it clear that the Spirit witnesses along with our spirit that we are children of God, and thus heirs of God. We are assured of our sonship and our inheritance by the witness of the Spirit.

Paul is saying that this assurance that God gives you is not merely subjective or objective, it's both. Your spirit bears witness *and* the Holy Spirit also bears witness.

But furthermore, he says that the Holy Spirit's bearing witness that we are the children of God does not mean that we're not going to suffer. In fact, precisely because he bears witness that we are true children of God, we may expect to suffer in this life. As one of the old Puritans said, "God has one Son without sin, but none without suffering."

So what is Paul's point in these verses? Paul's point is that you have been so united to the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit of adoption, that you are one with him in his sufferings, and you will be one with him in his glory.

And when you doubt that you will be one with him in his glory, you remember that you are one with him in his sufferings. And it is just as certain that you will be one with him in his glory, as it is that you are going through trials now.

Every trial that you go through in life is a witness of the Spirit that you are going to share in the glory of the inheritance of the Son of God.

Conclusion

And so the apostle says that we are confident that we are no longer under condemnation because we are the children of God.

How do we know that we are the children of God? We know that we are the children of God because we do not live like non-Christians, we kill sin, we are led by the Spirit, we are adopted by God, and we are assured by the Spirit.

There is a church in northern California that has portraits of

famous people hanging in its vestibule. There is a portrait of Socrates and another of Eleanor Roosevelt. There is a portrait of Abraham Lincoln and Ghandi and Jesus. These words are written in beautiful gold letters over the assembled portraits, “And we are all children of God.”

I am sure people pass by those portraits every day and marvel at the universal brotherhood of man. There is only one problem: the universal brotherhood of man (and the universal fatherhood of God) is an inclusive, benevolent, politically correct, loving lie. The quote in gold letters is even a quote from the Bible—but it is incomplete. What the Scripture actually says is that “we are all children of God *through faith in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:26, *KJV*).

If you have faith in Jesus Christ, you can be assured that there is now no condemnation for you. And furthermore, you—and only you who have faith in Jesus Christ—can be assured that you are a child of God.

So the question for you is this: *Are you a child God by faith in Jesus Christ?* I trust that you can answer, “Yes! By God’s grace I am a child of God because I trust in Jesus Christ!” Amen.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

This sermon, and other sermons, by the Rev. Freddy Fritz can be found at:

1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons
2. www.sermoncentral.com/contributor_profile.asp?ContributorID=11181
3. www.sermonaudio.com/search.asp?SpeakerOnly=true&currSection=sermonsspeaker&keyword=Freddy%5EFritz

Please give your input and leave your feedback at websites 2 and 3 when requested to do so. This helps with evaluation and planning of sermons.

Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org

PRAAYER:

From Ray Ortlund's *A Passion for God*:

Our Father in heaven, we find deep within our hearts a persistent longing for you. As much as we violate it, that longing does not die. It wanes. It fluctuates. But it does not die, for you have put it there and you sustain it by your grace. You have laid claim to our love, and you will not be denied. And this is how we know that we really are your children—amid all our failures, our souls keep gravitating towards you. You know all things, Lord. You know how often we deny you. But you also know that we truly love you. And now we know that our yearnings will not be frustrated, but will be infinitely, richly, gloriously fulfilled when this life is finally over. We will enter into our heavenly inheritance and see you face to face. Your glorious presence will be worth it all, blessed Abba.

And all of this we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

Go and glorify God in all that you think, do, and say! And as you do, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.