

New Life in the Spirit

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from Paul's letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verses 9 through 17, as printed in the liturgy.

You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness.

And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

[1 : 2 0] Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation, but it's not to the flesh to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are fed by the Spirit of God are the children of God.

The Spirit you received does not make slaves so that you live in fear again. Rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

And by him we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now, if we are children, then we are heirs.

Heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. If indeed we share in his sufferings, in order that we may also share in his glory.

[2 : 1 9] This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church. Thanks to the few of you who encouraged me to take my jacket off this Sunday.

I appreciate your compassion and permission to do that. We are continuing today just preaching through the Apostle Paul's great epistle to the church in Rome.

And I just want to begin asking this question. Like, why is it important for us to know the Apostle Paul and to know his writings? And I want to start with a quote from a British historian.

His name is Tom Holland. He's got a great podcast called The Rest is History. Oxford and sort of Cambridge-trained historian. He says this. Paul's letters are like a collection of acorns from which mighty oaks have grown.

They are the most influential pieces of writing to have survived from antiquity. And their influence on Christian history and the present-day character and assumptions of the West are incalculable.

[3 : 21] Not just our earliest sources for Christianity, they are also the most influential. If the European philosophical tradition can be characterized as a series of footnotes to Plato, then even more so can Christian theology be characterized as a series of footnotes to Paul.

Yet that does not mean he should be regarded as the founder of Christianity. Without Jesus, we would never have heard of Paul. The figure of Christ stands at the heart of Paul's letters just as he stands at the heart of the later Gospels.

That is why Christianity, although it may be Pauline, is not named after Paul. And Holland goes on elsewhere and he says, I think of Paul as a kind of depth charge deep beneath the foundations of the classical world.

He sets up ripple effects of revolution throughout Western history. And I think this is interesting because even if you're here and you don't agree with all the things that the Apostle Paul is saying, Holland would say that, you know, you can't even understand the present character and assumptions of Western culture.

You can't appreciate the various ripple effects of revolution that have happened through Western history without Paul. So just on an intellectual level, looking at what Paul has to say is just a matter of historical and cultural literacy.

[4 : 39] But of course, what we're doing today goes way beyond the intellectual level because we're talking about matters of both the head and the heart. And we saw this great theme in Romans 8 last week is about the comfort and the security that a Christian believer has with an assurance of their salvation.

The absolute certainty of the absolute certainty of the final perseverance of all who are truly justified in Jesus Christ by faith. That's what Romans 8 is all about. And I want to encourage you, as I did last week, to put this chapter of the Bible, or at least parts of it, into your memory bank to meditate upon.

Everything we read about in Romans 8 is made possible and is put into effect by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. God the Father planned our salvation.

God the Son carried it out. But God the Holy Spirit is the one who applies that salvation to us. And this is why the Holy Spirit is mentioned in this chapter 21 times.

It tells us that the Christian life is essentially life in the Spirit. Life animated, empowered, sustained, directed, and enriched by the Holy Spirit. Without the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 56] True Christian discipleship would be inconceivable and impossible. And in fact, the hallmark of any authentic believer, the hallmark of any true Christian and real disciple of Jesus is are you filled with the Holy Spirit?

Are you indwelt by the Holy Spirit? Are you being led by the Holy Spirit? And what we want to look at today is the way that the Holy Spirit applies God's salvation to us.

And particularly the way he gives us these three gifts. We're going to limit ourselves to just three. But he gives us three gifts. And what he says, particularly in verses 14 to 17, is that God's Spirit gives you a stable identity, a vital relationship, and a future hope.

God's Spirit gives you a stable identity, a vital relationship, and a future hope. As Andrew said, this is a special sermon where we're installing Andrew Ong as our associate pastor and ordaining and installing Jesus Arseneaga as our ruling elder.

So this is a particular word to you two guys today as shepherds of God's flock. But really to all of the leaders of God's church is that it's our task to serve the people of God by helping them discover and treasure and nurture these three gifts from the Spirit.

[7 : 19] A stable identity, a vital relationship, and a future hope. So let's start with this first one. God's Spirit gives you a stable identity. Last week I said that our culture highlights freedom as the main theme and value of our society.

Freedom is seen as the highest good. But it may be more accurate to say that there are two interdependent cultural narratives. First of all, there's freedom, which is that no one has the right to tell me how to live my life unless I hamper the freedom of others.

But in addition to freedom, there's identity. Identity says I ought to be true to myself and express my deepest desires and dreams no matter what others say. And these are the two narratives of our culture, freedom and identity.

I have one slide. I don't know if we can bring it up. But it's from a psychologist at San Diego State who talks about the ways, looks at all the different books that have been written in the last many years.

And the way that this word identity has skyrocketed in our imaginations. We're kind of obsessed about identity. And what is identity? Identity consists of two things.

[8 : 29] First of all, an identity is about a sense of self that's durable. Right? We live in many different spheres at once. We live with our family at home and we're a colleague at work and we're with our friends and we're alone in solitude.

But an identity is that sustained sense of self that's true of you in all spheres no matter where you go and what you're doing. And the second thing is that identity is not only about a sense of self, but it's also about a sense of worth.

A sense of dignity and honor. And we don't have time this morning to talk about and to examine the dynamics of identity formation. But I would argue that modern identities are inherently unstable.

Modern identities are inherently insecure because they're based on one of two things. They're either based on what my society or my group says about me or they're based on what I think about myself.

And I want to challenge that approach to identity this morning and say, what if identity is about more than that? What if identity is not about what society and my group says about me or about what I think about myself?

[9 : 39] But what if identity is about what God says about me and what God thinks about me? And the gospel tells us that we can have a stable and secure identity that cannot be shaken.

And this is what Paul says in verse 14. He says that those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. Now the negative truth of that, first of all, is that not all people are the children of God.

Those who are led by the Spirit of God, they and they alone are the sons and the daughters of God. And there's some circles that will talk about, you know, the universal fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

There are people who will take that further and talk about universal salvation, that in the end, everyone is going to be saved. But the teaching of Jesus, the teaching of the Bible says otherwise.

Jesus himself divides humanity into two groups and to use his language, he talks about the saved and the lost. He talks about those who are perishing and those who are alive.

[10 : 42] And that's a hard truth. That's why Jesus got rejected. But Paul is bringing that up here for us again in verse 9. He says, You, however, are not controlled by the sinful nature but are in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you.

And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. So Paul is saying, Not all people have the Spirit of God, therefore they don't all belong to Christ. Therefore, they don't all have God as their father.

They're not children of the Father. And Paul has been making this case since Romans 5 that none of us by nature are a child of God. We are rather the children of Adam.

That's our parentage. That's where we belong by nature. And the Scriptures tell us that on the other hand, Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. And so he stands alone and unique in this category over here.

And this poses a great question for us. How then does anyone become a son or a daughter of God? And Paul tells us, he says, Adoption is this great word.

[12 : 00] It's an act of God in which by grace he deliberately chooses us and takes us in so that we belong to him.

And with adoption we come to bear the family name. And we come to eat at the family table and we work in the family business and we share in the family inheritance.

To be someone who's adopted is to be given an exalted position with immense privileges as sons and daughters. Now to come and to share the status and all the benefits of God's only begotten Son, Jesus.

If you're adopted, that means that you are as secure in the Father's love as Jesus is secure in the Father's love. Paul is saying that if we're in Jesus Christ and if we're led by the Holy Spirit, then your true identity, your enduring sense of self in all spheres of life, that identity that gives you a sense of worth and dignity is that you are the sons and the daughters of God.

And your identity is defined not by yourself, not by your group, but by someone beyond you and someone much greater than you. And this is vastly different than modern approaches to identity formation because on the one hand, in modern life you look inside yourself to discover your deepest desires and dreams and to express them.

[13 : 31] And then you'll know who you truly are. Or on the other hand, you essentialize your gender, your race, your class, your age, your sexuality, and you say, this is who I am, and you define yourself either by what you're not or by who's against you.

And the reason both of these approaches to identity are so unstable is that they do not start high enough and they do not go deep enough. We need someone from outside of ourselves on the one hand and someone outside of our group and our society on the other hand to instill in us a sense of self and a sense of worth and to try to rely on our own self-affirmations or to try to rely on the affirmations and the agendas of our group or our society is inherently unstable because that's constantly changing.

But the gospel says that someone from outside of ourselves, someone from outside of our group, has conferred upon us a sense of self and a sense of worth that can never change and that can never be taken away.

If you're exploring Christianity and you're open to the idea that there is a God and that that God is a good and a trustworthy and a loving God, that if he made you and if he's the source of your life, you have to ask the question, is it possible for me to have a stable sense of self and worth apart from that God?

And the offer of the gospel is that you need no longer be a stranger to that God. You need no longer be even an enemy of that God, but you can become his child. And the apostle Paul says it like this in Romans chapter 10.

[15 : 15] He says, if you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you can be saved. You can become a child of God and have this identity that's stable and secure.

And if you're a Christian today, I want to say that you need not look for your identity in here, in yourself. Nor do you need to go look for your identity over here in your group or in society.

But rather, you already have an identity that comes from up here, that comes from this spirit of adoption who's brought you in.

You've been deliberately chosen. You've been proactively taken in. You belong. You're a beloved son and daughter. That is who you fundamentally are.

God loves you as much as he loves his only begotten son, Jesus, and he can't love anyone more than that. So your task, if that's true of you, your task is not to go in search of an identity.

[16 : 23] Your task is to spend time on a daily basis cultivating and nurturing this God-given identity that you already have, exulting in the status that you have as an adopted, chosen, and beloved child of God.

Thank you so much. I'm always waiting, you know, just to see. God's spirit gives you a stable identity, and you can't get that identity anywhere else.

But God's spirit not only gives you a stable identity, he also gives you a vital relationship. He gives you this vital relationship. He continues that verse. He says, The spirit enables you to cry, Abba, Father.

The spirit enables you to cry, Abba, Father. It's within this stable identity as a son or a daughter, as someone who's an adopted and a beloved child, that you have the confidence now of knowing who and whose you are to actively and regularly cry to God.

Because with this new identity and this new position, this new status, you've been given a new voice and a new tongue. And with that voice and with that tongue, you cry out to God.

[17 : 46] And this is not a generic God or a distant God. No, he's a very specific God and a cloud who is very close. Because what do we say to him? We say, Abba, Father.

Abba, Father. Abba, of course, is the Aramaic and pater is the Greek. And Abba is this homely word used by children who are talking familiarly with their fathers.

It's like the word papa or daddy or opa or baba. That's how Jesus talks to his father. In the Garden of Gethsemane, for example, he says, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you.

And what the Spirit does is he comes into our lives and he enables us to talk to God like Jesus talks to God. And what does it mean for us to cry out, Abba, Father?

Well, it means that the Holy Spirit has granted you an especially close and personal and loving relationship with God as your heavenly father. So that whatever your family of origin, whoever your parents were, you now have the father of Jesus Christ as your father.

[18 : 58] And I know some of you and I know your stories. You didn't have the father you wanted or the father you needed. Some of you weren't provided for and protected. Some of you weren't cherished and treasured.

But look who you've been given now. And how do we relate to him? It says that we cry. We cry, which suggests vulnerability.

It suggests a safety and an earnestness and a deep emotion and fervency that we can bring all of ourselves to him. And when we cry, what do we say?

We say, Abba, which suggests warmth and affection and rejoicing and happiness and exuberance. When my kids were little, some of you remember that time, and they would run up to me and they'd throw themselves at me.

And they would just grab hold of my leg and just cling on and they would hang there. They would just hang. And if any of you did that today, that would be strange.

[20 : 01] That would be overly familiar. But these are my children. I'm their daddy. That is their rightful place. Right? Now, if they came and tried to do that today, they'd break my legs.

You know, they would break my hip. So now that they're bigger and older, they still know that even when I'm in the middle of something extremely important, they can walk right in.

They can call me up and I'm going to interrupt and I'm going to answer their call. And they know that they have access to me. They know that they can come up right up next to my side and grab hold of my hand and whisper something into my ear and I'm going to give them my full attention.

They come to me with the boldness of a child who knows their daddy. And what the Holy Spirit gives to you as a Christian is he enables you to talk intimately and confidently to God.

And notice that I said intimately and confidently, not irreverently and flippantly. Right? Because some people read this and they start to pray, hey dad. I don't know if you've ever heard someone say, hey dad.

[21 : 13] And if that's you, I love you, just stop doing that. When Jesus prays in the Gospels, he prays, holy father, righteous father.

In the Sermon on the Mount, he teaches us to pray, say, our heavenly father. Father. Because this is a transcendent and an exalted God, a sovereign and supreme God. But, we can cry out to him, Abba, Father.

And when we do, we have immediate and bold access to him. Not as fearful, cowering slaves, but as cheerful, confident sons and daughters.

And what happens when we do that? What happens when we cry out, Abba, Father? Paul says in verse 16 that the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

When we cry, Abba, Father, and when we take upon our lips the very words that Jesus used, when we come to these spirit-inspired scriptures and we say, Abba, Father, show me more of your glory through your word, the Holy Spirit shows up and he begins to bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

[22 : 27] God. And I don't know about you, but sometimes when that happens, I become so overwhelmed with a fresh realization that my Father knows me.

That my Father, in fact, knows me more than I know myself. He knows the very number of hairs on my head, which is getting easier and easier year by year.

He knows reality and history way more than I do. He knows my past and my present and my future. He has plans for me.

He has great plans for me that include trials and troubles. He has plans that include my pain and my suffering. He has plans to correct me and to discipline me, but I become overwhelmed by this realization with the spirit bearing witness to my spirit that I am his child and he is my Father and he can even make the worst things in my life work out for my good and for his glory.

And it's just an amazing experience. And if you've never had that experience, if you don't know what verse 16 is talking about, I want to encourage you, ask for it.

[23 : 38] Ask for the spirit to bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. Jesus says in Luke chapter 11, he says, if you, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

I was reading this week an old Puritan preacher, probably from about 400 years ago, and he says this, he says, picture a man who's walking along a road with his little boy holding hands, father and son, son and father.

And the little boy knows that this man and his father and that his father loves him, but suddenly the father stops and picks up the boy and lifts him up into his arms and embraces him and kisses him.

And then the father puts him down again and they continue walking. And this man said, he said, the boy is no more a son when he's being embraced than he was before. And the father's action has not changed the relationship, but oh, how much greater is the enjoyment of that relationship.

It is a wonderful thing to be walking along holding your father's hand, but it's an incomparably greater thing to have his arms enfolded around you. And that's what Jesus means when he says, ask your father to give you more of the Holy Spirit.

[25 : 05] It's what Paul means when he says the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Just say, Lord, I know you love me, but give me more of your love. Of course, if you do this, fair warning, there's ethical and moral consequences to crying out, Abba, Father.

Because along with this comes a desire that others would see in us a life reminiscent of the Father himself. That we would imitate him and that people would want, people would be able to see in us no consistency between our conduct and the Father's character.

And so a spirit-filled, spirit-led Christian hears Paul saying, you need to put to death the misdeeds of the body. You need to kill off all that pride and you need to mortify all that self-centeredness.

And you say, well, of course, that's what I want to do. Of course, that's what I want to do because I'm so grateful to be an adopted child. I'm so grateful to be a beloved son and a daughter.

I want absolutely no dishonor to come to my Father on my account. I just want to adequately reflect and express and represent his glory and his excellencies to all the people around me.

[26 : 17] That's what it means to cry out and have this vital relationship and say, Abba, Father. Now, I want to close talking about one final thing and that is that God's spirit not only gives you a stable identity and a vital relationship but he also gives us a future hope.

He gives us a future hope. You're probably aware that there's an increasing number of people in our society who are filled with despair. Right? They look at the future and the future is utterly bleak and hopeless.

And on the one hand, that's a bad thing. It's not good to live in a society that's so charged with pessimism and nihilism and doom and gloom.

But of course, on the other hand, this is often what's required to come to the end of ourselves and the end of our schemes. Right? And to begin to look beyond this material world to a hope above and beyond this world and this life.

And that's what Paul is getting at in verse 17. He says, Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

[27 : 37] Many people have been writing today about the great wealth transfer. Have you read about the great wealth transfer? The silent and boomer generations are going to bequest a total of \$84.4 trillion in assets through 2045.

And \$72.6 trillion is going to go directly to their heirs. Right? And so, maybe a few of you are going to be so blessed to be heirs to inherit a bit of that windfall.

So I hope you'll invite me to dinner. But let's assume that you are set to receive \$0 of that great wealth transfer.

The good news for you this morning is that if you're in Jesus Christ and if you're led by the Holy Spirit and God is your Abba Father, then you are the heir of an inheritance that's beyond your wildest imagination.

This great wealth transfer that's going to happen is just pennies in comparison with what you're going to get. And what does the Apostle Paul mean when he says we are heirs of God and we're going to share in the glory of Jesus Christ?

[28 : 54] If you go back to verse 11, he says, if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his spirit who lives in you.

This means that Christ's resurrection is the pledge and pattern of our coming resurrection. That the same spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us.

And the same spirit who's already given life to our spirits will also give life to our bodies. And that does not mean that our dead bodies will be revived and resuscitated so that we're restored to the present material existence that we have only to die again which would be a complete and total bummer.

No, Jesus was raised in such a way that he can never die again. And if you're in Jesus Christ, your future hope, your coming inheritance is that you are going to be raised up with a new body.

And your body is going to be transformed into this glorious, powerful, spiritual, imperishable, immortal body like the body of Jesus. You're going to be liberated from all the vestiges of sin and frailty and disease and pain and decay and death.

[30 : 18] And this is why Christians are people who are eagerly and fearlessly awaiting this future hope as we endure this world and this life that's marked by death.

But that's only one aspect of our future hope. Paul says in verse 17, he says, now if we are children then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

What are we set to inherit? Well, as I close, Jesus, when he was talking with his disciples on the night before he was to be crucified, he told them a parable just before the last supper and he ended that parable saying this, he said, then the king will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Your inheritance is an entire kingdom. He said to them at the end of that last supper, he said, I confer on you a kingdom just as my father conferred one on me so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones.

So you not only have a kingdom but you have the table of the king and you have the throne of the king. And then after that supper Jesus said to them additionally, he said, my father's house has many rooms and I am going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

[31 : 58] And that is so crucial for us to hear because Jesus is telling us there that I want you to be with me that you might be where I am. Your inheritance is not necessarily a something.

Your inheritance is a someone. You're not just set to receive a resurrection body and a kingdom and a table of the king and a throne with the king.

You're going to get all those things but what you're set to receive is the king himself. The triune God infinite and eternal and all of his glory and power all of his excellencies and all of his strength and all of his life and all of his goodness that is what you the heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ are set to inherit.

And so my friends we who are filled with the spirit of God we who cry out to him Abba Father we who know Jesus as our king we have no right to despair.

We have no right to be people who are just utterly sad. God we are called to be a people of joy and a people of hope in the midst of this world that's despairing daily.

[33 : 22] So may God empower us to be that. May God empower us to do that. That this future hope would outweigh all the current sufferings that we currently share with Christ because it says we are going to share in his glory.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Thank you.