

Freedom in Christ

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[0 : 00] we're not just physical beings. We have this thing called life in the Spirit. And that, says Paul, is the most important thing.

To be in Christ, to be free in Christ, means that our life is essentially life in the Holy Spirit. Paul puts it, you, however, are not in the realm of the flesh, but are in the realm of the Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit that gives us freedom, that gives us identity. In Romans chapter 8, I'm told that there's more references to the Holy Spirit than in any other single chapter in the entire New Testament.

And in these few verses alone, the Spirit is mentioned 16 times. It's clearly a preoccupation for Paul. So what does it look like then?

What does it mean in real, actual, practical terms to be talking about living out that identity in Christ, life in the Spirit, and to be free therein? Well, there's some things going to come up on the screen.

[1 : 13] The first thing here is that life in the Spirit gives us a new possession. Now, the Holy Spirit obviously is not a commodity.

It's not a thing we own. It's not just a resort. But when Paul says that the Holy Spirit is in us, it means that there is a real sense in which God's Spirit becomes something.

We are his possession and he is ours. In verse 9 it says, God's Spirit lives in you. New possession. Last summer was the Queen's Jubilee and there were a lot of stories being put out there from people, anecdotes, people that had met the Queen.

You may have heard this particular story, but it was my favourite one. It was told by one of her former security guards who was out walking in the estate, in the Balmoral estate years ago.

And it was just him and the Queen and they came across a couple of American walkers who, it would seem, didn't recognise her. But they were very friendly and they struck up a conversation and they said, so do you live near here?

[2 : 29] She said, apparently no, I live in London, but I've got a little holiday home round the corner. I said, oh, so have you been coming here for long?

She said, well yeah, since I was a little girl, so over 80 years now. And apparently, they then said, well if you've been coming here all this time, you must have met the Queen.

And she was very fast, she said, oh I haven't, but he has lots of times. Pointing to the security guard who's recounting this story. So they turned to him and they said, so what's she like?

And he said he worked with her for long enough to be able to get away with this. He said to them, well she can be quite cantankerous sometimes, but she's got a wonderful sense of humour. And they still didn't cotton on.

They said, we could just do anything to have a photo taken with someone who's met the Queen. At which point, one of them passed their phone to the Queen. And said, can you take a photo of us with this guy?

[3 : 35] So she did, and they kept straight faces right the way through this. But before the conversation ended, they swapped places and the Queen insisted that they also take one with her in it.

And then, just as they went, she said to her security guard, I would give anything to be a fly on the wall. When they get home, they're retelling this story, and they're showing these photos to their friends.

Being in the presence of royalty and just not recognising it. You can see where this is going. When you become a Christian, you become in Christ.

You have a new possession, as I say, not as a resource, not as a commodity, but the Holy Spirit of God, the one who raised Jesus from the dead.

The Holy Spirit of the living God is the one who you meet with. And yet, and yet we overlook that significance. We don't recognise it.

[4 : 44] We don't take it on board. Perhaps it's a lifelong process of coming to terms with that reality, but that is the reality. We meet simply not with royalty.

We meet with the living God. And we have the living God communing with us in our everyday lives. And we need to wake up and smell the coffee and recognise that reality.

Because when we see that that is our possession, that the Holy Spirit of God is not simply around us and beside us, although he is all those things, but is actually within us, that's the game changer. And Paul says, everything else has got to be worked out from there. God's Spirit lives in you. You have this extraordinary, extraordinary possession that my guess is most of the time we simply don't take on board.

We don't recognise. The second thing is that, yes, we have a new possession, but it gives us a new position. Paul says in this passage that we become children of God.

[6 : 02] Become adopted into God's family. That's what this identity is, to be in Christ. Christ. And you have a new freedom because when you understand your identity in those terms, that you not only just meet this God that we need to recognise, but actually we become God's children, it changes the way we see things, we see ourselves, we see our interactions, the way we see our identity.

Several years ago, there was an experiment, a rather unusual one, that was carried out by a psychologist. They had ten people in this sample, in this experiment.

And they said, they explained to these volunteers that it was a social experiment and with the help of, the help of make-up, they had some Hollywood sort of make-up artists as part of the experiment, they put the volunteers into ten cubicles and they said, what we're going to do is we're going to paint quite a noticeable scar on your faces.

So there were about two hours going through this, putting the make-up on and so each of the volunteers was aware that this was serious business, this was going to look realistic and then they showed them what they looked like in the mirror and they said, what we're going to do is we're going to ask you to go out and just interact with people for several hours, go into as many shops, cafes, restaurants, whatever, talk to as many people and get on public transport and just interact and we just want you to then come back and we're going to interview you because we want to know how people interact with you when they see what you've got on your faces.

We said, just before we send you out we just need to send you back into the cubicles and just do a little bit of finishing touches to the make-up. At which point what they didn't realise was that they actually removed the scars from their faces.

[8 : 05] So these volunteers go out into the public situation thinking that they've been made up when in fact they haven't at all. They look exactly the same as they always have done. Do you know when those ten people came back afterwards and were interviewed without exception they said that people treated them so strangely.

People would either look the other way, would ignore them, people cut them short, they said it was just terrible. the worst few hours of their lives. You see, well that simple experiment serves to illustrate is the difference that self-image makes.

When you have a picture in your mind's eye as to what you are it shapes the way that you perceive others and you interact with others.

in Christ we have this new position and it's a position that defines or should define the way that we see ourselves and our relationships and the way that we interact with others.

When we see things through that lens it changes everything. Our new position is that we are God's children in Christ. God's spirit lives in us.

[9 : 23] We have a new possession, we have a new position. The third thing is we have a new prospect. Usually when you inherit something when somebody else dies in in these verses from Paul Paul we are told that we inherit something when we die.

We are heirs of God he says in verse 17 co-heirs with Christ. In other words everything that we see in the risen Jesus will be ours.

The kingdom of God in all its fullness which is so much bigger and greater than anything else that this world has to offer will be ours. And whilst it will only fully be ours in eternity we get a glimpse now.

Because that identity in Christ starts now. The Holy Spirit is in us now. We are God's children now and therefore that prospect of the future begins now.

We're not there yet and we won't be there until we get there. But we have that new prospect. We are heirs of God's kingdom.

[10 : 54] And so the fourth the last one that I want to suggest is that what this gives us is a radically new pursuit. this is what the journey is all about.

Now it may well be that we listen to some of these things and we think this sounds great I just long wish I had this sense of the Holy Spirit being in my life as his possession. I wish I had that sense of identity that sense of position that sense of a child of God I wish I really kind of took that on board. That sense of the future promise I'd love all that I'd love to think all that yet I struggle so much I get it wrong in my life I don't sort of live that out I make mistakes it's such a struggle for me to kind of come to terms with all this.

If you're feeling any of that then be reassured this is why Paul wrote these words because it's a struggle. That's why these words are here for us in Romans chapter 8 to say that life is a struggle there is this thing called the flesh and there's everything that distracts us and pulls us in the direction of all the stuff that is effected eventually will come to nothing everything that will die out there's all of those things going on but but be reassured it's a lifelong pursuit but we are called to make this our focus to cast our eyes onto Jesus to make him the focus and him the focus alone and sometimes we'll get that right and sometimes we'll get that wrong but he's with us he's there for us he's that new possession that's in us he's that one that gives us that radically new position he holds out that prospect before us and so we have this new lifelong pursuit and it's never too late to start it and it's never too late to restart it apparently

I'd never come across this before but apparently there is a proverb that comes from France originally that says the best the best starter for any meal is hunger if talking about these things wets your appetite be encouraged because that's where he meets us and as we come to pray now if perhaps that sense of hunger after God's Holy Spirit is something that resonates with you then that's fantastic but don't beat yourself up over it see it as a positive and take that hunger for his Holy Spirit to that sense of renewed identity in him bring it to him and invite his Holy Spirit in let's pray together now let's take a few moments just to be still as we reflect on these things and as we bring our lives before him knowing that we we have a life our flesh our lives in the flesh our lives here and now are mortal lives but knowing that that is not the dominant theme

[14 : 09] Lord we are human beings and we come to you as we are because we can come no other way and we confess to you all about us that is broken that is distorted that is messed up we bring before you our past and indeed our present and things that perhaps bring us a sense of shame but Lord thank you that your view of us is so much more positive than our view of us so Lord as we say to you that we are sorry and we confess our wrongdoing to you thank you that we may know that our life our identity is life in the spirit Holy Spirit would you breathe would you pour into our hearts that renewed sense of freedom that comes only from you

Lord would you shape in us that new sense of identity that position that we are your children Lord would you focus us in on that hope that promise that prospect that is ours for all eternity and Lord would you in your Holy Spirit enable us to pursue these things now and in our daily lives so Lord Holy Spirit pour into us now let's just wait upon God as we wait upon his Holy Spirit Holy Spirit would you pour out yourself upon us and in us renew a sense of your presence now as we worship you thank you

Jesus you you God yeah