

The Christian's Identity and Our Status as Sons of God

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Date: 08 March 2026

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[0:00] Let's turn together now to hear the Word of God in the New Testament, in Paul's letter to Romans and in chapter number 8. Romans chapter 8, reading at the beginning of the chapter, down to verse number 17.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh, set their minds on the things of the flesh. For those who live according to the Spirit, set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law.

[1:22] Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.

Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you be to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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.

[2:29] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and of 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.

Amen. Amen. This is God's word. We trust that he will bless to us, reading from it. We're now going to praise God from the Scottish Psalter from Psalm number 30.

And at the beginning of the psalm, Psalm number 30, it's on page 239. Lord, I will thee extol, for thou hast lifted me on high, and o'er me thou to rejoice, may it's not mine enemy.

From verse 1 to the verse mark 5, to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Rejoice, it's not mine enemy. O thou who art the Lord my God, I am distressed to thee.

[4:13] With thy cries lifted up my voice, and thou hast healed me.

O Lord, my soul, thou hast brought up, and rescued from the grave.

That I to play should not go down, a life thou didst me save.

O ye that are his holy ones, sing praise unto the Lord.

And give unto him times when ye this holiness reward.

[5:35] For but a moment lost his wrath, life in his favor lies.

We may fall and I endure, a Lord of joy arise.

Let's turn together now to Paul's letter to Romans and chapter number 8. And we're going to read at verse number 14.

Romans 8 and verse 14. And so on down to verse number 17.

And I guess whatever we are looking at in life, if we have the opportunity to look from the outside inwards, we can see something of the issues that are involved.

[7:03] And at the beginning of our service this evening, we can perhaps pick up two lenses that will help us to understand what this church looks like. And that will help us, I hope, to understand what we look like ourselves.

And when we look at this church in Rome in the first place, we see that in the masses of the population of the city, there was a mix of cultures, and most of them were made up of Greeks and of Jews.

And in the culture of the church in Rome, there were two issues. And the Gentiles in the church in Rome, they found fault with the traditional Jewish Christians because of their observance of the Old Testament law and maintained that they were out of touch with reality.

On the other hand, the Jewish Christians looked at the Gentile Christians and saw them as modern-day lawless Christians because they did not keep the Old Testament laws as the Jews did. And when Paul is writing this letter, he is writing it to, in a way, to level out the whole of the experience of all of the different cultures in Rome so that they would understand the error of their thinking and so that they would respect each other in the Lord.

[8:35] The second lens that helps us to see what this church was like is that there were two particular groups of people that Paul is trying to address.

And the first of these is there were those who were what we call self-righteous. They saw themselves as good people. They were upright people.

They were law-abiding citizens. They were self-righteous. But the problem with the self-righteous people in Rome, as it is with the self-righteous people in Stornoway, the problem is that they don't appreciate the passion and work of Christ.

And Paul, in his writing, he is addressing these good people who saw themselves as good and saw themselves as good enough and he wants them to understand the gospel.

The other group that we focus upon is a group that were Christians but they didn't understand that they were and they lacked the assurance of their faith.

[9:42] And as surely as it is important for Paul to address those who think they're so good, they're okay, Paul wants to address those who are Christians and yet don't realize it.

He wants to give them the assurance of their faith. And it's important for ourselves to have that kind of lens when we come to think of ourselves.

Where are we as we use these two lenses? Are we good enough and so good that we don't need the Lord Jesus? Are we Christians but perhaps we don't realize that we are and we struggle with anxiety and concern and we never come to a place where we are sure.

and we know that in the world in which we live there is such an emphasis on personal identity.

Who we are and who we think we are. And there's a fluidity in that same personal identity so that we can move from being identified as one thing to being identified as another.

[10:53] There's a crisis of identity in society and there is a crisis of identity in the church in the sense that where the gospel is preached there is a transition in our identity.

We are either those sinners who are lost with our grace and salvation or we are those sinners who are saved and who are in Christ. And the nature of the gospel is that God takes us from this place to that place.

From being lost sinners to being sinners saved by grace. And I want us to bear these things in mind and as we look at these verses to consider our Christian identity and our status as the sons, the children of God.

First of all, I want us to notice that there is confusion facing us in these verses. And the confusion is with regard to the characteristic that makes us the children of God.

There is only one way this evening that we are Christians. There is only one way this evening that we are the children of God. And through these verses Paul lays his finger on that.

[12:14] It's those who have the Spirit of God. And it's important for us to always remember that in our thinking that we think the Holy Spirit is so much lesser than God the Father and the Lord Jesus.

When we read about the Spirit of God anywhere in the Bible there's an equality at the level at which the Holy Spirit is held in honour and respected and he has the same level of honour and respect as God does and as the Son of God does.

And what marks us out this evening and in any other time in life as the children of God is what we see referred to for example in verse number 9 where he speaks about the Spirit of God dwelling in you.

And remarkably for you and I this evening if your life is going to be changed it's God coming home to you.

It's a wonderful thought that the eternal God in all of his power and in all of his glory that for us to become the children of God he is coming to dwell in our hearts.

[13:35] Our hearts are to be his home. God is in that sense coming home to us to dwell with us forever.

He's not coming as a visitor who's going to speak to us through his word this evening in the church in Kenner Street. He is the Holy Spirit of God who will be with us forever.

And we should never be so confused in our thinking that we think we can be Christians and we can be the children of God without this God coming home to you.

And in all of your thinking this evening as we enter into looking at these words we remind ourselves of that important fact if you're a child of God it is because of what the Spirit of God has done and not because of what you have done.

And when we think of that characteristic that makes us the children of God let us notice also that God does not make a forced entry into our hearts to make us the children of God.

[14:49] In this moment at which we become the children of God he comes to dwell with us and as we read in version number 15 you have received the Spirit.

And the whole picture that we have in receiving everything is welcoming. It's going to my door and seeing who's at the door and welcoming this person with open arms because we have longed to see them.

It's that welcome of faith that self-prompted action that movement of our hearts that receives and welcomes the Spirit of God.

And however much we understand what it means to be the children of God if we are children of God tonight we will know something of that welcome something of God coming home to us as if he comes to knock on the door of our hearts which by grace he opens himself and we welcome the Spirit of God into our hearts.

No one ever had salvation pushed down their throats by God. It is the point at which two parties who were estranged from each other suddenly come together embrace each other and God comes to dwell in the person's heart.

[16:19] And Paul Paul says in version number 9 of this chapter that the person who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Christ.

And as we look further into the confusion it is important for you and for me to recognize that critical fact. Could you be confused into thinking that you are the child of God and this has not happened to you.

It is the work of God that opens the hearts of the sinner like you and like me so that he himself comes into our hearts and brings about that change.

And perhaps one of the signs of that already taking place is what Jesus promises in John chapter 16 when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our hearts he will do many things but one of the things he will do is he will take what belongs to Jesus and he will show it to you.

And here is the clear indication that God has changed my heart and God has changed your heart if suddenly you see Jesus Christ in a way that you have never seen before and in a way that makes you leave everything else behind and realize that Jesus Christ is my savior I am saved by grace alone on the basis of what Christ alone has done that's the defining characteristic and it is with

regard to that characteristic that we find confusion in this passage and we see that confusion in verse number 15 for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear the spirit is not the one who produces slavery and whether they're Jews or Gentiles whoever they are the history is such that they were slaves ask a Jew what slavery means and the Jew will tell you the children of Israel were slaves in the land of Egypt they were pushed into serving the

[18:41] Egyptians they knew what slavery was they knew what a hard taskmaster was they knew what it was to fear the taskmaster and the confusion here in Rome is such that those who have the spirit of God in their hearts the spirit that we see at the beginning of this chapter bringing about freedom are actually falling back again returning to the sense of slavery they were rescued from the fear of the taskmaster who expected them to give perfect obedience to his most holy law they had that fear of God it was a slavish fear and God has rescued them from that but now they're reverting to that default position where they see themselves having to keep the law of God perfectly and because they see that they're not able to do that instead of enjoying their freedom they're going about with anxiety with no assurance and doubtless doubting their very conversion to

Christ and their being the children of God confusion that arises between the freedom that God gives by a spirit in Christ and the inclination that we have to always look at fulfilling God's law to be accepted by him and I'm fairly confident that in this gathering tonight there are those who have faith there are those who are the children of God and yet spend their lives feeling themselves as a complete failure because they don't understand what God has done and because of what God has done they are striving earnestly!

To keep the law of God perfectly trying to achieve what cannot be achieved and failing to understand that they have been set free from the law as their taskmaster or as the means to which they are to be saved that Jesus Christ is what Paul calls later on this letter!

to God is the end! I need no longer to look at achieving or looking at my own performance in order to know that I'm the child of God I simply need to understand what God has done and I think it's it's a question that we can all ask ourselves how much will our lives be governed by our own performance instead of by the promises of God and the power of the Spirit of God in our lives let's ask ourselves that question are we confused are we dependent on our own performance or do we have the freedom that we depend on the performance of the Lord Jesus who lived the perfect life who died the death of the cross who was raised again and to his glory do we trust in his finished work the confusion secondly there is a correction and we see the correction in that same verse you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons what does this

God coming home to me mean what does the spirit of God in my heart mean for me and what does it mean for you it's not the spirit that produces the sense of being a slave it is the spirit that produces the sense of being a son of God and Paul is using the sense of being placed as a son in a family which was understood in the days in which Paul was writing where there would be a family where there was no obvious heir where there was no male son to whom the family lineage would belong and to have that responsibility as the head of the family and in that kind of situation it was the legal thing to do the obvious thing to do was to adopt a son to take a son who belonged to another family and to place it in that person's own family to give that new son the same rights the same privileges the same obligations the same responsibilities to be in that family as a real living active son with all of the rights and that son that was now adopted into that family would conform to all of the family life and all that was involved in the family home he is taking what they understood from what happened around them but he is also going back to the

[24:31] Old Testament sense of God saying in Exodus chapter 4 Israel my covenant people those whom I have come to rescue from Egypt they are my firstborn son when I read sonship in the Bible with regard to the people of God it reminds me of God's covenant commitment to save a people for himself and down through the Old Testament into the new the people that he saves they become his sons we saw in Psalm 2 the way in which there's that conversation between the father and the son you are my son today

I've begotten you there is that sense of sonship that belongs to Jesus Christ as God's son and now there is the sense of sonship that belongs to the children of God and

Paul wants them to understand that when God came into their lives and God changed their hearts that this is what the spirit of God produces he does nothing different whoever they are whether they were self righteous before whether there were Gentiles before whether Jews before it does not matter God does not have a different way of dealing with different people and different cultures there is one way it's the new birth and it's the spirit of God coming to dwell in our hearts it is the spirit that produces sonship and that of course brings us to our identity if God has come home to your heart if you are welcomed to the Lord Jesus into your life who tonight do you think you are do you understand who you are do you understand that there has been the transition where God has taken you from being a sinner under his judgment and lost to being a sinner saved by grace who is now the son of God the child of God who do you think you are who do you believe you are our identity is defined by external things and in this case defined by who God is and what God has done and what he has done in our hearts and our lives and we need to ask ourselves that simple question who do we think we are God knows who we are God doesn't want us tonight to be lost in the sense of anxiety and of fearing and the absence of freedom God wants you and me as the children of God to know to understand his love the prophecy of Jeremiah there's a great passage in chapter 31 where God is speaking about Ephraim as his own people and he's raising the question himself is Ephraim not my dear son in whom I delight as if would anyone dare suggest that even although the children of God are in exile would anyone dare to suggest that they are not the children of God I still remember him says God my heart yearns for him that's the love that's the care that's the correction that you and I need tonight to let the light of the sonship that the spirit of God produces in our hearts to let that shine in our hearts to bring about the sense of freedom that is so often so far from us and that very spirit that produces sonship it is evidenced also by the way in which that spirit produces a family conversation there's something wrong in any family there's a breakdown in any family if people aren't talking to each other there's a serious breakdown if children aren't talking to their parents the family unit works and operates on the basis that relationships are working as they should and here in the sense of the family of God and the sonship and the children of God we have received the spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry Abba Father the newborn child cries the person who is a newborn child of God cries to God cry in the Old Testament is a cry that's expressed by the person who's crying in a case of emergency crying out to God in the day of trouble it's a come and rescue me cry it's a come and help me cry it's a cry that sometimes may not have words but there's that sense of groaning and of reaching out to God for the help that only God can give and in a sense our relationship with [30:44] God always leads us and brings us to places where we are in an emergency and the emergency means that we need always to trust in God and to depend upon him I may go out from the service this evening and something may happen something may trigger something in my mind in my life something that I did not expect it is an emergency what does the child of God do with the emergency the child of God cries Abba Father that double cry that speaks of warmth of intimacy of love and of care my father and it is a cry that remarkably we share with the

Lord Jesus himself in the garden of Gethsemane in the emergency in the crisis of going to the cross and the darkness of that moment Abba Father all things are possible with you there's a closeness there's a sense of a bond there's a sense of an unbreakable relationship the situation is changing but it doesn't alter the cry of the son to the father Abba father and perhaps it is worth noticing that the same Jesus who says Abba father in the garden is the same Jesus who goes to the cross and who says my God my God why have you forsaken me there is at least the suggestion that when I address

God as my God it may be in a place of crisis but it does speak of distance whereas when I address God as my father it does suggest intimacy and tonight what is your prayer life what does it look like or what does your prayer life sound like is it a prayer life that speaks loudly of your distance from God or is it a prayer life that speaks loudly of your closeness to God and sometimes in the life of the church it was claimed to be a sign of humility if we did not use the address my father but the Bible makes clear as we see in the life of the Lord Jesus in this passage and also in

Galatians chapter 4 it is the kind of cry that the children of God have with regard to their father what does your prayer life sound like if you are the child of God you will have a prayer life what does it sound like how do you see God is he the distant God that you're not that intimate with or is he the God who is close to you the God who is dwelling in your heart by his Holy Spirit and that you sense the closeness and you know the intimacy and you speak to him as your father the correction and thirdly there is confirmation how can you be sure how can

I be sure tonight that we are the children of God and we have something of the confirmation in version number 16 the spirit himself the spirit that produces the sense of sonship the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God there is a sense of a legal process there is the sense of two witnesses!

[35:27] There is the sense of two witnesses making their statement about the same event in order to confirm the reality of that event and here we see that that statement that evidence is brought about with our spirit that we are the children of God there is a communication between the Holy spirit of God and our inner beings Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians of no one knowing the thoughts of a person but the spirit of that person no one knows tonight what you are thinking what's going on internally in your mind as we sit together as we stand to worship God no one knows that but you alone but the picture that we have here is that your internal being your intellect your thinking your spirit that it is the place for this legal setting and for these evidences and for these witnesses to speak out!

And the spirit himself bears witness that we are the children of God at the very outset we spoke about the way in which when God comes home to us and we welcome God into our lives that makes us the children of God and Paul is reminding us here that as we go on our journey the spirit speaks about that event and we remember that event and these two witnesses give to us confirmation every day that we are the children of God we listen to the evidence we may doubt the evidence that we raise ourselves but what Paul is seeing here is that the key witness is the Holy Spirit himself who has worked to make us the children of God he bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of

God and that suggests to us strongly that we need to have space for God in our lives we have space for our daily work and responsibilities we have space for our daily learning we have space for recreation we have space for our interaction with others we make space for all of these things justifiably as part of living in our world but we must have space for God because unless we do have that space for God the noise of the world and the culture in which we live the noise that is around us will dampen will drown and will remove the sense that the spirit of God gives to us to give us the assurance of our identity as the children of

God and perhaps tonight if you are a child of God and you doubt your salvation and you doubt that you are the child of God and you cannot dare say to anybody that you are because you're not sure perhaps the reason for that is that you have too much clutter in your life that you have no real space for God and that you have not created that and therefore you're not hearing what God is saying to you there has to be that sense of noise cancellation with regard to the things in the world we live in a society where there are so many demands on our time whether we're young or old or whoever we are even technology itself places so much demands upon us and we are all close if not already there close to being addicted to our devices and to all that the whole of the world can bring into our lives sitting in our homes lives we are making space for the world and creating more and more space for our world and less and less space for God and when

I'm saying that I'm saying it to myself first of all and I think it is reflective of what is happening in the world in which we live and as we close tonight perhaps the greatest take away from our time together would be that we commit ourselves to make more space for God in our lives to go apart and to listen to what God is saying not just what he's saying to us in the worship of his name and in the preaching of the gospel on the Lord's day but to ensure that we have that space every day at some point in the day that we are disciplined to make space for God and the promise is from all that God says in the Bible that if we give space to God in that way that we will hear more from him learn more about him learn more about ourselves and understand our identity as the children of

[41:28] God more and more that was the problem in the church in Rome they were confused are we confused about what it means to be the sons of God do we understand what makes us the children of God and do we understand that only by the spirit of God coming to our hearts welcomed by us that that is the only thing that makes us the children of God and do we long tonight to be sure well God wants us all to be sure to be sure of our salvation to be sure that we are God's children he wants us to understand that if we think we are Christians and we are not he wants us to know the truth and he also wants tonight if we are Christians and we don't fully appreciate that that he will also come and make that clear to us may God help us to trust to hear to understand and to know who we are as the children of

God may God bless his word let us pray most gracious God we rejoice in you as our father who is in heaven we bless you for your care of us your interest in us we give thanks to you for that close and special relationship that you give to us as your children here in this world help us to understand that relationship better help us to live as your children help us to have joy in you and help us to know the assurance of your love and give us to rejoice in you day by day as we live our lives wherever we go so that we may have strong faith and deepening love and daily desire to do things that are pleasing to you that we may shine forth as lights for you in our world we do pray hear us and accept us for Jesus sake Amen so the closing psalm is psalm number 103 and sing psalms on page 135 and we're singing at verse number 8 and I think on your bulletin it says 8 to 18 but if we can sing from 8 to 14 and not 8 to 18 psalm 103 on page 135 at verse number 8 the lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face from verse 8 to verse 14 to god's praise the lord is merciful and kind to anger slow and full of grace he will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face he does not punish our mistakes or give our sins their just reward how great his love has been as as far as as far as as far as as he is from the west so far his love has borne away our many sins and trespasses and and all the guilt that on us lay just as a father loves his child so

God loves those who hear his name for he remembers we are dust and well he knows our people frame and well he knows our people frame if you allow me to go to the main door after the benediction the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen Amen Thank you.