



26 slaves & sons
Romans 8:12-17
July 21, 2019
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

Let's Pray and ask God to change us through the reading of His Word.

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.

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The first thing I want you to notice is that in verse 12 Paul says that we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. - then we get a period... He then starts *another* sentence.

The natural flow here, you would think... would be the contrast that he has been making between Spirit and flesh and so we would think that he is saying "but rather the Spirit, you are debtors to the Spirit but NOT THE FLESH.

But what Paul actually says is that we are NOT DEBTORS to the flesh... and in terms of what it is that you owe or are bound to here... he leaves it at that.

in fact, if you move ahead to Romans 13, Paul actually says that you are to OWE NOTHING TO ANYONE... EXCEPT... to love each other.

Paul says that the only thing that you and I are in debt to IS LOVE... and not just any love... but you are in debt to LOVE OTHERS.

Could you imagine if Christians actually took this passage seriously? We will talk about this more when we study Romans 13, of course... but think about this:

at least in my circles... most people become Christians and then think that the point is that they need to change their behavior... and so that is where their energy goes. They think that because Jesus died for their sins, they owe it to Him to make sure that they live a life now in which they DO NOT SIN EVER...

But WHAT IF... WHAT IF we realized that the when you become a Christian, your job... your sole... one and only job is to now reflect Jesus to the world in the way that you LOVE THEM...

I think we would have a whole lot more people becoming Christians...

I think that it is important that we make the distinction here that there IS a requirement to love other people but we don't OWE ANYTHING to Jesus, despite His doing EVERYTHING FOR US.

It is easy to think that Jesus has put us in HIS DEBT by dying on the cross for our sins. But the cross was NOT A LOAN.

I often feel that way... like "I owe Jesus everything for what He did for me... and by our world's standards I certainly would... and whether I owe Him everything or not, I still want to live my life GIVING HIM EVERYTHING...

but the cross was a GIFT.

Jesus did not die so that He could then require a bunch of things from you... Jesus died so that He could free you from the person you used to be.

Grace is not something that you are given only to now have a mortgage that you are paying on for the next 30 years... and it is if you never refinance.

that was the flesh.

WE WERE IN DEBT TO OUR FLESH... To our desires... to our own sinful nature.

Dawn and I know what it is like *to have debt*, and **that debt has controlled our ability to live the fullest kind of life.**

Anyone who is in debt, and one day becomes free of that debt knows the difference in their lives that it makes to not have to pay on that every month anymore. Suddenly, you can realistically and truly begin planning ahead, and saving and building the life that you have dreamed about having.

but when you have debt...

what you make is **already tied up in your past**, and you are unable to put it toward your future...

that is what it is to be in debt to the flesh... it keeps you bound by who you used to be and prevents you from being who you were CREATED to be.

but again... it doesn't say that you are instead in debt to the Spirit... what it says is that you are **NO LONGER IN DEBT TO THE FLESH**, and if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

In other words, it is **ONLY** by the SPIRIT that you will ever live the kind of life that Jesus died for you to live.

The Greek word *pneuma* which is the word "Spirit" - appears 20 times in Romans chapter 8 after only appearing five times in the entire book leading up to chapter 8. So its very apparent that the Spirit is the central theme of the chapter, and that is fascinating... because chapter 8 is when **EVERYTHING CHANGES**... comes to its climax... it reaches its proper conclusion...

and the entire thing lands on the Holy Spirit. It seems to be Paul's end all cure to the human condition... Jesus paid for it... and the Spirit LEADS US THROUGH IT... never speaking on His own account but always on behalf of Jesus.

I want to encourage you, before we go any further... live your life relying on the Holy Spirit. Seek Him every day about your day... God TRULY DOES CARE ABOUT THE SMALL THINGS... the minor details... the trips to the grocery store and the kids day at school... most of us go through our days and we get so busy with so many things... we get lost in the noise of our world and we never take the time to just rest in the glory of God and ask the Holy Spirit to be our guide through our day. What we are going to learn about in a moment is that we have been adopted into the family of God, and with that adoption comes an inheritance and with that adoption comes immediate access to things like the Holy Spirit.

in verse 15 it says: **For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons -**

now we will come back to the fear part in a little while, but first we want to explore the concept of the Spirit of adoption.

In Roman culture particularly - adoption was a really big deal. There was a latin phrase "*patria potestas*"

and what it means is "power of the Father" - in early Roman culture the Father had ALL of the power over the family. In fact, this family law actually gave Fathers the power of life and death over their children, it wasn't always a good thing, but it was how families were ruled.

and this went until the Father died. It didn't even end when the Son himself became a Father. The Grand Father was the one who was over everyone... until he died, he ruled his home and family line, and all who descended from his line, but when he died, his inheritance went to his children.

So when you were being adopted into a new family, you were actually being joined under the rule of a life leader, and you were laying down the rights that you had in your old family... they were gone forever. But what you gained is ALL THE RIGHTS OF SONSHIP in the new family.

All of them. In Rome, as it should be, there was NO DISTINCTION whether you were biologically born or adopted. A son is a son... and what often would happen was someone would adopt another person into their family, because they realized that they had no-one to pass their legacy down to... in fact, sometimes they would even adopt adults... but in the process they would ALWAYS consider "*patria potestas*" - because yes you get the inheritance... but you also go under the rule... the leadership...

but it's not a debt. its a place in a family.

Some examples of this include Julius Caesar who ADOPTED Augustus.

Augustus gained all of the rights as the SON of Caesar...

When Julius Caesar died, there happened to be a large star that had appeared in the sky. History records it as "Caesar's comet"

and then suddenly in an instant the star shot away into nowhere... and what was said of that star was that it was Julius Caesar ascending to Heaven because he was god... So then Augustus, who took over as the RIGHTFUL heir of his adopted Father, said "if Julius Caesar is God, and I am his son, then that makes me THE SON OF GOD."

So he printed Roman coins with his face on them and an imprint saying "Son of the Divine" - and it stuck.

During Paul's day... Claudius Caesar ADOPTED Nero... and then when Nero's mother poisoned and killed Claudius... guess who got the throne?

The son that he adopted.

both Augustus and Nero BECAME CAESAR... the highest post in the land, because when they were adopted they became heir to everything that was their Father's.

... So what is happening here, according to Paul... is you are going from a person who was once in debt... a slave to a master...

a person who, your entire paycheck goes to pay for your past and there is little opportunity to build a future...

suddenly you go from that, to being a SON in the family of God, and HEIR TO EVERYTHING.

And Paul warns us... okay... you have been given everything. we have been adopted into GOD HIMSELF... don't you dare go back to who you used to be.

Remember what we have been saying... how so much of Romans particularly chapters 6, 7, and 8 are a bit of a retelling of the Exodus narrative... for Israel, God did an amazing act of grace and brought them out of slavery... out from under the rule of Pharaoh and of Egypt... and yet they just kept wanting to GO BACK.

This is a parallel... remember, the Torah was always read in 4 layers... the first is what was plainly going on and the 4th was the secret meaning... the thing BEHIND WHAT WAS PLAINLY GOING ON... and in the story of the Exodus, Egypt and its oppressive rule was a symbol of the Sin that controls our lives - the flesh... the life that we have that is always looking backwards controlled by our past without a hope for a future.

the story of the Exodus is our story... we have been set free, yet we keep wanting to go back to who we used to be... but remember... living life in the flesh... IT IS SLAVERY. Just like Israel was enslaved all those years in Egypt...

but look at what this says:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons

It doesn't say to fall back into sin... it says "to fall back into fear"

Don't fall back into fear.

THE WORLD IS CONTROLLED BY SIN. Sin runs rampant... the world needs Jesus to wash them white as snow... we are people who can not save ourselves...

but as for Christians... people who already have acknowledged that we are sinful and that we need the grace of God to rescue us and the Holy Spirit to turn us into who we are supposed to be...

I am convinced that one of the most dominant things that causes Christians to sin is fear. James tells us that it is a SIN to know the right thing to do, and then to not do it... and sometimes I think that we base so much of our lives around HOW WE ARE AFFECTED BY SOMETHING, that we begin to convince ourselves that it is okay to not help people, or stand up for the marginalized, or whatever it may be... because that person could be a threat to us or to the life that we have.

Fear is the thing that stands in the way of us loving our neighbor...
Fear is the thing that stands in the way of our welcoming the stranger...

Let it not be so. We WERE NOT adopted into the family of God just so that we can live a castle in Heaven. We are still under the rule of the Father, and the Father's command is LOVE. If we are to reflect God... it is the very definition OF GOD... LOVE.

Listen church, the Christian life is not meant to be an easy one.

The calling that God has placed on your life, I believe that IF you truly walk in it then it will absolutely be LIFE to you, and you will have wholeness and fulfillment in it... but that doesn't mean it will be easy.

I was talking to a friend this week about calling... about becoming who you are supposed to be... I think a lot of people miss their calling because of fear... because the thing that God really has for them to do has a cost that seems really high at the time and so we cower away from it.

I told him two things that I think prevent us from our calling are coveting and comfort... I am sure there are a lot of other things, but these were the things that were on my heart. The things I warned him about were coveting and comfort.

we talked a couple weeks ago about coveting... if we can't delight in the mission God has given us, and the LIFE THAT GOD HAS GIVEN US..

and embrace where He has us, we will NEVER be who we are supposed to be in *that* place... and what we don't realize is that IF we think that the grass is greener someplace else... all we have to do is go to that other place and stay there a little while before we realize "if I had just watered my grass it would have been greener back there."

But you won't water something that you despise. If you can't find delight in the life that God gave you, you will never do the work of cultivating it into what it could be.

but ON THE OTHER HAND... if we get too comfortable there... then we will begin to guard anything that has the potential to threaten that comfort. We will reject the impulse to be generous because we want to make sure that we will have enough... whatever it may be -

but the Christian life is not meant to be comfortable its meant to be messy - because people are messy... and situations are messy. And God needs people who are willing to see through the messes and find the potential in people... and find the potential in circumstances and in places that seem broken.

Today's passage ends with this line: (we are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ) **provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**

This to me is pretty incredible. The word here for “suffer with him” is a variation on the Greek word for suffering that results in a word actually quite similar to EMPATHY. It is the word: *sympaschō* (süm-pä'-skhō)- and it means “to feel pain together” - to share in pain with someone... or TO SHARE IN SOMEONE ELSE’S PAIN.

The ONLY other time that we get this word in the Bible is 1 Corinthians 12:26 when it is talking about the church as the body of Christ, and it says “when one member suffers, everyone suffers with them” - because we are family.

Naturally, our lives should be a reflection of people who share in the sufferings of Christ because it is the suffering of Christ that leads the world to its HOPE.

He SUFFERED ON BEHALF OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

you have to see this for what it is... in life, you will suffer sometimes... but this is not saying that in the moments that life is going well and there is no pain... that you are NOT sharing in the glory of Christ... like we always have to be suffering to be okay.

Listen, if someone put a gun to my head and told me to deny Jesus, I would like to believe that I WOULD NOT DENY JESUS. In my heart, I really hope and want to believe that I would lay my life down before I would deny Him... but I don’t think that suffering LIKE CHRIST is typically about WHO you know... as much as it is what you are willing to lose for the sake of someone else to GAIN THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

For Jesus, He suffered FOR PEOPLE.

If you are one of those people who just needs to be suffering all the time to think that you are close to Jesus... we need to pray for you...

the point is that we are to be willing to lay down our lives... or in some instances our time or our energy or our gifts or our treasures for the sake of SHOWING OTHERS WHAT THE LOVE OF CHRIST LOOKS LIKE.

For the sake of showing others WHO CHRIST SUFFERED FOR... US!

Let me give you a bit of an example... this is not to toot our own horn IT REALLY IS NOT... and I know that others go through a lot harder things -

but as you all know, just about every single day we are working on the garden and the reconciliation table right now. A good handful of you have come out several times... yesterday was the hottest day of the year and a lot of us were out in the heat working there.

a lot of us work REALLY hard there... but nobody works harder than Dawn... she was there all day Friday... then woke up at 5am and was there at 6am Saturday... and we worked until almost 8pm...

we are tired.

but we are not doing it because we are driven to complete a project so we can check it off of our list and move on... and we are not doing it so we can pat ourselves on the back and give each other a high five and say GOOD JOB.

You don't show up on the hottest day of the year at 6am and stay until the sun is setting so you can give a few high fives.

She is there... and all of us who go for any period of time... we are there because we want to SHOW OUR COMMUNITY HOW MUCH JESUS LOVES THEM.

and some days it is really really hard... and other days it's so rewarding and fulfilling that it doesn't even seem like work.

for us right now that just looks like us working really really hard to create something special for our neighbors. And it is working. Already it is working. Yesterday a man came over and asked if we would do this to his empty lot... he said "nobody is building anything here, this is AMAZING!

- people come by that lot, and we never even tell them that we are the church and when they leave they tell us that they will be in church on Sunday.

we are like... what? how did you even know?

Because they see us working on something that is for them. And they know that that is not the way the world works.

You have to be willing to hurt a little if it means helping someone. You have to be willing to be uncomfortable.

And I am NOT trying to downplay the reality of true suffering... people who are truly marginalized... or people who are sick beyond anything that I can even imagine. But I don't think that Paul is just saying "if we randomly suffer we are like Christ" -

God can use any pain... but Jesus was willing to give himself to a cause that He knew would kill Him BECAUSE IT MEANT OTHERS WOULD BE REDEEMED BECAUSE OF IT.

But I am telling you, if you want to be glorified with Christ... do the work of laying down whatever needs to be laid down in your life so that you can SPREAD THE GLORY OF GOD, and the message of what has ALREADY been done... THROUGHOUT THE WORLD NOW...

this particular passage to me really seems like one of "how do we live every day" more than "how do we handle suffering when it comes"

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What are we in debt to? THE ONLY THING WE ARE IN DEBT TO IS LOVE.

To love others...

and that is how we live EVERY DAY. By loving others at any cost.

Honestly... when you put yourself there... and you see the world for as broken as it is... if you have the heart of Christ IT IS GOING TO HURT SO BAD THAT YOU ARE TRULY ARE WILLING TO DO ANYTHING THAT YOU CAN to help reconcile it.

your heart and the things that you feel will launch you into the places that YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO GO to help others... that thing that breaks your heart is probably a tell tale sign of what you were put here to bring healing to.

Now, one more time, lets read all of verse 15 - and look at one more thing IN LIGHT of the fact that loving others like Jesus is going to hurt sometimes... its a messy business but it IS OUR CALLING:

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!”

Abba Father.

The word “Abba” is a fascinating one. In Hebrew, the word “Ab” means Father - Ab - Father ABraham...

But Paul is not writing in Hebrew he is writing in Greek and it is actually an Aramaic word.

I did a word search on the word Abba, and was actually VERY surprised by what I found, because I never realized this before.

the word is only used three times in the New Testament at all.

Once by Jesus, and two times Paul says it, and BOTH times Paul uses the word “crying.” He says in Romans **“you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”**

and the other time is in Galatians 4:6 which is also about adoption and it says “because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”

So both times he refers to it as crying... but also:

Both times it is the Spirit speaking or the Spirit speaking through someone... BY THE SPIRIT we can cry Abba...

in John 14 Jesus actually calls the Holy Spirit the comforter... and it is only by Him that we are able to cry Abba! Father.

So this crying to Abba... it seems that these are the moments in which things are so bad that we don't even know how to ask God for help... SO THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH US DOES IT... and we cry ABBA. A few verses later in Romans 8, it actually says that **"the Spirit helps us in our weakness**. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words"

it goes on to say that the Spirit intercedes in those moments according to THE WILL OF GOD.

I believe that the calling of "Abba" is just that. It is the Spirit praying for us when we don't know what to say or how to say it in moments when our life, our calling, our mission, our friendships, our family... whatever it may be... seems to be in a situation WAY BEYOND WHAT WE CAN HANDLE ON OUR OWN.

That language being used twice really interested me, that both times Paul uses "Abba" the Spirit is saying it, and it is actually being CRIED... it is out of desperation...

but here is what sold me:

The only other time you get the word Abba in the New Testament is in Mark 14, from the mouth of Jesus himself... and in that moment... he is crying. (Mark 14:36)

He is in the Garden of Gethsemane, which is where he will be arrested... and Gethsemane means "the place of the press" - it was named after a

wine press - which we have talked pretty thoroughly in this series about presses... crucibles... processes that we have to go through to get the result that we want.

and He knows that He is about to go to the cross and Mark's Gospel records Jesus saying that he was "exceedingly sorrowful - even unto death..." and it is then that Jesus says "Abba - Father - if possible let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will but your will."

This moment is understood in a variety of ways... some people believe that Jesus was having second thoughts on whether or not He was actually willing to die for the sins of the world.

I personally don't think so.

Jesus was arrested during passover. The last supper was a passover seder... which was a meal in which everyone drank from four cups. We did a whole sermon on that when we were studying Romans 3. And what would happen was, when you would drink from the cup, you would drink as deeply of the wine as you could before letting the cup pass from you on to the next person.

At the bottom of the cup was the dregs and seeds and everything that would settle at the bottom, so that last drink would be just nasty.... Nobody wanted that last drink. Nobody wanted to drink "deeply" of the bitter.

Well there was a tradition that the person who took that last drink would have to drink all of the stuff that settles on the bottom, and it would be a bitter, nasty drink, and they would take it all down, then they would take that cup, they would refill it with FRESH WINE, and then they would "let that cup pass from them..." to the next person.

What Jesus was saying was, if it be possible, let's do this all in one drink.

IF DRINKING THIS WILL TAKE CARE OF HUMANITY... if it truly is what humanity NEEDS... let me drink so deep that I clear out everything that is in there... so when I pass the cup on to the world... it can be full again.

If it be possible, he wanted to take everything... every last disgusting drink... every bitter experience. All the junk that is lingering in our lives... He is saying: Let me take the weight of this. Let me take the tears, and death, and the mess that all of these people have made of their lives...

let me drink deeply, so as to empty the cup of all that bad... and fill it with FRESH WINE... NEW LIFE... before letting it pass from me to them.

The suffering that Jesus endured was for the sake of you and I now able to drink from the full cup... to have the fullest life... to not be bound to our flesh anymore but to be set free. And when we are willing to sacrifice... to give up our place for someone else... to lay down our comfort so someone else can experience Jesus in a moment through our lives... we will be glorified with God because every time we do things that LOOK LIKE JESUS... we are spreading the GLORY OF JESUS THROUGHOUT OUR WORLD.

The church exists to bring wholeness to the broken places. We were not adopted into the family of God, where we now are able to live in the GRACE OF GOD and are now HEIRS TO EVERYTHING THAT IS GOD'S... just so that we could let fear send us back to who we used to be... people who live our lives for ourselves and do things that look nothing like Jesus.

We were created to love even when it hurts. That is precisely what Jesus did for us.