

Our Inheritance as Children of God Romans 8:12–17 Pent 6A17 7-16-17

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. With these words from verse 11, Paul gives meaning to the word that begin today's Epistle, "So then, brothers, we are debtors."

We have mortal bodies that will die because of our sin. Yet we will have life because of the Spirit that dwells within us. If we deserve something bad, but experience good as a gift, then we are debtors.

In the old days a debtor would be imprisoned or sold into indentured servitude. Debt today still enslaves us to the one we owe. It causes some to postpone retirement or marriage until it gets paid off. College loans may postpone buying that first home.

If someone comes along and pays off that debt as favor to us, we are not legally indebted to them, but we do feel morally indebted to them, as we are indeed.

Sin makes us debtors in the sense that we owe God something to make up for disobeying him. But it is debt we can never repay.

A sin debtor's prison is a place where would find Sisyphus of Greek mythology, He was a wicked king whose punishment in Hades was to roll a huge rock up a hill only to have it roll down again as soon as he reached the top. This was repeated for eternity. Trying pay off sin's debt feels that way.

Jesus, however, sets you really, legally, eternally free from the fear of sin's death penalty and from laboring to pay off an impossible debt. On the cross, he announced that that all that was paid in full with his death. We are not debtors to the law, or to sin, but to Christ who has set us free.

But wait, there's more. Not only are we not slaves, but we are children of God. This does not depend on our work, but on God's mercy. That's why we love Jesus' parable of the son who wasted his inheritance on sinful living. With humble regret he returned home, begging to be treated as a servant, admitting his sin and unworthiness to be a son. But his father eagerly and joyfully welcomed him back as a true son. His earthly inheritance was gone, but He was never rejected by His Father. He would have an eternal inheritance.

What good news that must have been also for the Christians in Corinth. To them Paul wrote: *"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?"* He cites those guilty of sexual immorality, including adultery and homosexual acts, along with idolatry, theft, greed, cheating, drunkenness and abusive anger. But then he adds, ¹¹*And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*

Note who is doing the verbs. Our cleansing and righteousness before God is God's doing all the way through. Therefore, we need not fear. We are not foster children who can be sent back if we slip up. We are God's children adopted by his grace, redeemed by the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus.

Therefore, we call God the Father, Abba, a term that does not lessen his majesty or our respect, but emphasizes his compassionate and loving heart. In that spirit, Luther was spot on when he explained why Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father." *"God would thereby tenderly urge us to believe that He is our true Father, and that we are His true children, so that we may ask Him confidently with all assurance, as dear children ask their dear father."*

When you doubt that go to God's Word, which both Isaiah and Jesus assure us that by it the Spirit works faith. By it the Spirit bears witness to our Spirit that we are children of God. By the Spirit John writes of Jesus, *to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, and See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* Do not rely on your emotions to determine what God thinks of you. Do not let the heaviness of your conscience gauge the height of his compassion.

Paul closes by saying that we are heirs, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. Willingness to suffer is not a good work we do to earn anything, but it is a sign that we walk by faith in the blessed assurance that we truly are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. As heirs, as children, and not slaves, we know nothing will can keep us from what He has promised. How do we know? An inheritance takes effect upon the death of the one who gives the inheritance. When Christ died, you received the inheritance that God gives to His children. Amen.