



PRACTICING THE RESURRECTION | OUR INHERITANCE (32)

May 4, 2025

Romans 8:12-17

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

INTRODUCTION

We're in a sermon series on Romans 8, inspired by N. T. Wright's book "Into the Heart of Romans." Last week, we saw how the chapter's central theme is assurance, beginning with the opening verse, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." After clarifying our need for salvation (chapters 1-3) and righteousness by faith alone (chapters 4-7), Paul describes what a life in the Holy Spirit looks like in Chapter 8. Paul contrasts the life that lives according to the flesh with the life led by the Spirit and explains to us that through the Spirit, we are adopted as God's children. Furthermore, we are co-heirs with Jesus and have a rich inheritance from God our Father. We're in a new series called *Practicing the Resurrection*, and this week we'll look at the topic of "Our Inheritance."

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 8:12-17

¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For 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. ¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For 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!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and 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.

BIBLE STUDY

1. Looking at the Bible

- Read the passage privately. What does the text say? What is the theme of this passage? Do you notice any keywords?

Digging Deeper:

Themes: flesh and Spirit, adoption

Keywords: heirs

Paul continues to teach on life by the Spirit and life by the flesh, and he sums up in verse 13 that it is equivalent to choosing life or death, echoing the analogy in verse 6. The reason

we should live a Spirit-led life is provided in verses 14 and 15: We have been adopted as God's children. Adoption was a common practice in Roman culture, and it was usually when a person of wealth and affluence had no heir to whom to pass on their inheritance. Theologian F. F. Bruce explains:

The term 'adoption' may have a somewhat artificial sound in our ears; but in the Roman world of the first century AD an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father's affection more fully and reproduce the father's character more worthily.

The adopted son was "deliberately chosen"; in other words, it was completely based on the legal action of the father. Although it was very costly on the father's part, the son did nothing to merit his adoption; it was an act of grace — a free gift. Paul lists the privileges of being a child of God in verses 15-16: no fear (this relationship is entirely accomplished by God in Christ), personal relationship with God (we can call him "Abba," which means "Daddy"), and assurance (the Spirit bears witness).

Moreover, we are not only God's sons but also fellow heirs with Christ (verse 17). Paul wrote in Galatians, "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Galatians 4:7). Paul mentions the inheritance frequently in his letters (Ephesians 1:11; Colossians 3:24), as do other biblical authors (Hebrews 9:5; 1 Peter 1:4). Theologians differ on the interpretation of Paul's use of heirs/inheritance in this text. The Anglican theologian John Stott, drawing from the Scottish theologian John Murray, suggests that "the inheritance Paul has in mind is not something God intends to bestow on us but God himself. Indeed, it is difficult to suppress the richer and deeper thought that God himself is the inheritance of his children." New Testament theologian Douglas Moo explains that the inheritance refers to the promises of God and the blessings of God's Kingdom. N. T. Wright writes that the inheritance isn't about "heaven" or our individual salvation but rather all of creation — the new heaven and new earth.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- Read verse 13. Paul has been contrasting life in the flesh and life in the Spirit from the beginning of this chapter, especially verses 5-8. What does it mean to "put to death the deeds of the body"? How does Jesus' work on the cross and the gospel enable us to do that?

Digging Deeper:

Theologians describe the process of putting to death the body's misdeeds as "mortification." The Greek verb Paul uses (*thanatoo*) is the word used for killing people or handing someone over for execution. The Apostle uses this analogy frequently in his other letters. For example, "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (Colossians 3:5) echoes Jesus' call to deny oneself, take up the cross, and follow him (Mark 8:34). Paul's teaching

in this verse is literally life or death. In his book “The Mortification of Sin,” the Puritan theologian John Owen famously summed it up as, “Be killing sin, or it will be killing you.”

So how does the believer mortify his/her sins? Notice the phrase “by the Spirit” before the verb. Paul is emphasizing that this action is only done by the power of the Holy Spirit; it is not something we can muster up in our own willpower and strength. Nevertheless, it is an exhortation and command for us to take initiative and take action; the verb is in the present tense to describe a daily, continuous activity. As John Owen wrote, “The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.” But if it’s done by the Holy Spirit and is not a legalistic command, what is the specific action for us in mortifying sin? The answer is in the context of Romans 8. Beginning in verse 1, observe the references Paul makes to Jesus: in Christ we are free and have no condemnation (1-2), Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirement of the law (3-4), we have the Spirit and new life through Christ (10-11). The biblical command toward humanity is always to believe — to believe in Jesus’ finished work on the cross, and to identify ourselves with his death and resurrection. Pastor Tim Keller described this verse (13) as “preaching the gospel to ourselves daily.” When we identify ourselves as having been crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20), we can then also crucify the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

3. Looking at our Hearts

- Read verse 15. Paul’s exhortation for us to live according to the Spirit is that we did not receive the spirit of slavery but of adoption as sons. How does this truth/identity motivate our hearts to live a Spirit-filled life?

Digging Deeper:

Paul’s letter to the Romans and Galatians go well together, as they share similar themes about the gospel, justification by faith, being dead to sin, the role of the law, and the new life as believers in the Spirit. Some theologians have referred to Galatians as “little Romans.” Galatians 4:1-7 echo Paul’s words in our passage in Romans:

¹I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Notice the repetitive comparison of slavery and sonship. We used to be slaves under the law, but the Holy Spirit now adopted us as sons, which is an act of God’s incredible love (1 John 3:1). The doctrine of *Sola Gratia* (salvation by grace alone) often receives criticism that it allows the believer to continue in his/her sins; there is no longer an obligation to follow the law. However, the Bible teaches that love is a stronger motivation than fear. Tim Keller offers the following illustration: “If I’m saved by my works, God can only demand the

minimum required of me—I paid my taxes, and I have my rights. On the other hand, if I’m saved by grace, then God can demand everything from me.”

Underlying the analogy of slaves and sons, Paul is also reminding us of the emotions of fear and love. We used to obey the law out of fear, but now that we are sons, we are “compelled by his love” to obey his commands (2 Corinthians 5:14). God did not give us a spirit of fear but of love (2 Timothy 1:7), and his perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18). Therefore, now we are free, but we don’t use our freedom as an opportunity to gratify the flesh but to serve God and our neighbors (Galatians 5:13). As adopted sons and daughters, we are now free to love God and obey his commands (John 14:15; 1 John 5:2-3).

4. Looking at our World

- Verse 17 says that being co-heirs with Christ also means sharing in his sufferings. How does this perspective change the way we look at suffering?

Digging Deeper:

Along with the human pain and suffering everyone experiences in life, we Christians are guaranteed a specific persecution because of our faith and righteous living. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). The Bible repeatedly explains that we will face suffering as Jesus did. Jesus warned the disciples that as the world hated and persecuted him, they will also hate and persecute them (John 15:18-20). However, Paul and the disciples considered it a great privilege and blessing to be suffering for their faith (Acts 5:41; Philippians 3:10). Peter wrote:

¹²Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. (1 Peter 4:12-14)

SHARING Share your prayer requests, thoughts, hopes and fears for the coming week, and as you do consider how this passage might give light to what you are sharing.

KINGDOM PRAYER Pray that we would see ourselves called by God.
Include other prayer requests.

SENDING God’s word is a lamp to our feet. Christ’s teachings are a light to our path.
May God’s word take root in our lives. May Christ’s love nourish and sustain us. Amen.