

To God Alone Be The Glory

(HCSB) ¹¹And if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also make your dying bodies alive by His Spirit living in you. ¹²And so, fellow Christians, we do not owe it to the flesh to live according to the flesh. ¹³Yes, if you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the Spirit you kill the activities of the body, you will live. ¹⁴For all who are moved by God's Spirit are God's children. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slaves to make you feel afraid again, but you received the spirit of God's adopted children by which we call out, "Abba, Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs, God's heirs, and joint heirs with Christ since we share in His suffering in order that we may also share in His glory. ¹⁸I consider our present sufferings to be unimportant when I compare them with the glory soon to be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the created world is waiting on tiptoe to see the unveiling of God's children.

OK, so I'm going to get to my point in a roundabout way. What kind of a news consumer are you? Some folks are news hounds. They devour the news feeds from MSNBC, or they like to have Fox News on all day long, or they read the newspaper daily, or they listen to talk radio or to "All Things Considered" on their commute. Are you a news hound?

Some folks do not like a daily dose of the news. "It's so negative," they say. They don't want to hear about murders, gang violence, fires, tornados, hurricanes,

political infighting, the total of virus infections, or the number deaths from the virus. It doesn't matter to these folks that each news broadcast ends with a human interest story, like when a restaurant owner sends food to a hospital for those fighting the virus on the front lines. "Most of the news is just bad news—unusual stuff that doesn't usually happen to most people. That's why I never watch the news or listen to it." Do you avoid the news?

Most people are in the middle. They understand that reporters are looking for stories to tell. They get it that news crews are never going to follow Christians around and report on their everyday living. Can you picture the headlines if they did? "Christian Student Does Homework Faithfully." "Christian Teenager Comes Home from Library on Time." "Father Cleans Out Dishwasher While Mother Does Laundry." "Christian Single has One Drink at Party, Arrives Home Safely." "Senior Church Member Prays for Pastor." I wonder if anyone would listen to the news if reporters wrote our story. Most practicing Christians live pretty mundane lives.

It wasn't always that way for us. Remember back to when the things of the world looked so alluring? We were coming out from under our parents' control, spreading our wings for solo flight away from the nest, experiencing many things for the first time. Thank God that nine out of ten people do not have the genetic predisposition toward addiction and can learn from their mistakes not to "do that again." Thank God that many

Christians with addiction learn how to channel their energy into God pleasing activities. “Uh, Pastor, why are you talking about addiction?” Because most of us have been touched by addiction one way or another, and it’s a strong example of how sin causes God’s good creation to go awry. Please keep an open heart toward anyone with addiction, because we all have had at least one sin get its hooks into us so that we could no longer master that sin without intervention from God. What’s been your greatest weakness? Greed, lying, worry, gossip, rebelliousness, over indulgence, dirty jokes, sexual temptations, prideful comparison of yourself to others, unwillingness to forgive. We really make a lot of trouble for ourselves and others by our sins. It’s a good thing Jesus’ death on the cross paid for the removal of all our sins from us. It’s a good thing the Holy Spirit is willing to work in us to disentangle our hearts from the sins that we have gotten hooked by.

It’s to people like you and me that the Apostle Paul was writing in Romans 8, people who have a flesh, a sinful nature that loves to get hooked on sin. Paul wrote: *12And so, fellow Christians, we do not owe it to the flesh to live according to the flesh. 13Yes, if you live according to the flesh, you will die.* Think of some obvious examples. Organized crime and gangs are all about the flesh, the sinful nature. How many people in gangs die of natural causes in their old age? Not many. Only if they manage to get out. But that’s such a dramatic news story. Let’s come

closer to home. If we encourage a sin to become a defining aspect of our life, even lay out an elaborate plan so we can get away with some sinful activity, eventually it will draw us away from God, and we will die, die spiritually. This is one reason almost all congregations in America, including St. John’s, are smaller now than they were during the previous century. People who used to be Christians chose to live according to the flesh, did not repent of it, died spiritually, and no longer make time for God’s Word.

It doesn’t have to be that way. No one is required to stay dead. All sinners are always welcome back in God’s family. That’s what Paul had in mind when he wrote, *11If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also make your dying bodies alive by His Spirit living in you.* Here in Romans 8 Paul is talking about being brought to life again spiritually. In this verse we see the Holy Spirit always trying to bring us back to faith when we stray. If you weren’t all watching from home, I would invite you to look around at all the people in this church that the Holy Spirit has brought back from straying at least once. Have you noticed the Holy Spirit doing this for you every time you listen to God’s Word? Isn’t it wonderful to have the Holy Spirit living inside you?

Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, none of us is ever really alone. God is always with us. And although we don’t usually pray to the Holy Spirit, we can. There’s only one God. So when you pray to the

heavenly Father or to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is right there listening. The Holy Spirit is God. His main task is to point us to Jesus. So he doesn't usually stand in the spotlight. But he is God, and he lives inside us believers, and we can talk to him. And we can rely on him to help us fight against our sinful flesh and to live for God. That's what Paul had in mind when he wrote, ¹³*If by the Spirit you kill the activities of the body, you will live. We kill the activities of the body by honestly confessing our sins to God. Then the Holy Spirit's forgiveness makes alive again.*

Do you understand the implications of this? There are going to be days, lots of days where we enjoy victories over sin by the power of the Holy Spirit. In fact, if the Holy Spirit leads you to do even one right thing for the love of Jesus, this is evidence that you are part of God's household, that you belong in God's family. Or as Paul says it, ¹⁴*All who are moved by God's Spirit are God's children.*

Yet there are times when even the strongest Christian feels fear. Although fear is now a recurring, expected part of life with our sinful flesh, it's not how God wants us to be all the time. Fear is what a slave feels. We used to be slaves, slaves to sin. Remember when you were powerless to fight a temptation on your own? What a horrible master sin was! We felt incessant shame. We were constantly afraid of getting caught. We hated hurting others by our words or actions. We feared being honest with God about our sins.

But when the Holy Spirit began living in our heart through baptism or through hearing God's Word again, we ceased to be slaves of sin. Now we are God's children. We don't have to live in fear. Paul says it this way: ¹⁵*For you did not receive the spirit of slaves to make you feel afraid again, but you received the spirit of God's adopted children by which we call out, "Abba, Father!"* "Abba" is the Aramaic word for father. Since Paul grew up speaking Aramaic, he was probably getting in touch with his childhood by slipping into the language of home, probably remembering the good relationship he had with his own father, or at least the respect.

Think about what Paul is saying here. Occasionally children are adopted into families where there are also biological children. In some cases those biological children are treated better than the adopted children. The adopted children still refer to their adoptive parents as "dad" and "mom," but they always feel like second class children. | Not us! We who have been brought to faith in Jesus have been adopted into God's family. Our heavenly Father treats us as well as his own Son. Some would argue that he treats us even better than his Son, because we did not have to pay for our sins on the cross. Jesus did that so we sinners could be adopted into his holy family. We're not second class children. We can call God "Abba"! How sweet it is to be loved by you, heavenly Father.

And now, whenever we wonder whether God still loves us, ¹⁶*The Spirit Himself*

testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Do an experiment on some of your Christian friends. Ask them, "How do you know you're a Christian?" Many of them will get a mystified look on their face as they pause to ponder. Eventually they say, "I just know." See? The Holy Spirit is so good at pointing our hearts toward Jesus our Redeemer that God's people often don't realize the Holy Spirit is right there in their hearts. He's the original soul whisperer: "You are a child of God. You are a child of God."

We are children of God, *17and if children, then heirs, God's heirs.* This means that we are in God's will. Kind of makes being in anyone else's will seem almost pointless, eh? Imagine being in Warren Buffet's will. His poor children are each going to receive only one billion dollars; he's giving the rest away to charity. Now that I'm in God's will, I don't need a billion dollars. A billion dollars wouldn't buy me even one day in heaven. As God's heirs we already have an eternal place waiting for us, thanks to Jesus.

But what about while we're waiting for our inheritance in heaven? Some days here can be pretty bad. Ever done any suffering? More to the point, was any of your suffering directly related to the fact that people knew you are a Christian and decided to stick it to you? Did they make fun of you? Drag you down to their level? Pressure you into crossing one of God's lines? Make it hard for you to get promoted? This too is part of being a child of God, an heir. We are *17joint heirs with Christ since we share in His suffering.*

When we suffer for Christ's name, let's remember that it will all be overcome in the end. We are God's children, *17and if children, then heirs, God's heirs, and joint heirs with Christ since we share in His suffering in order that we may also share in His glory.* As real as our suffering is, so much more real is our future glory. So whenever we are sad, let's try this: think to our future and compare it to today's hurts. Paul says, *18I consider our present sufferings to be unimportant when I compare them with the glory soon to be revealed in us.* I can hardly wait!

We're not the only ones who can hardly wait. The creation, this world we live in, is also chomping at the bit. It can hardly wait. *19For the created world is waiting on tiptoe to see the unveiling of God's children.* Right now we can't see who's a believer and who's not. We can only see evidence of faith, and the evidence can be misinterpreted. But on the final day, when Jesus comes back, every single person who believes in Jesus will be showcased, put on display as evidence that holy God wants sinners to be near him. That's why Jesus went to the trouble of redeeming us from sin.

Oh, that we were there now. But we have to wait. And waiting is ok because we know that God is planning all kinds of good for us. That's how we wait patiently, even through suffering. We look ahead all the way to the day that we will receive our full inheritance, the day we go to be with God. And in the meantime, we live according the Holy Spirit.