

## Romans 8:12-17

<sup>12</sup>So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

### The Household of God

Let me just come out and say it; Paul sounds crazy. How can it possibly be that we can have eternal life? We experience life as having stages that eventually end in death, and death comes regardless of **how** we live our lives. So to live according to the Spirit as Paul describes doesn't make a difference in the end, at least not based on what we observe. But then not everyone observes what Paul observes. Not everyone witnesses what Paul witnessed, a Risen Christ, a man who was tried and executed who is now alive and speaking to him. A man he considered his enemy and an enemy to his fellow Jews, alive, though invisible, teaching him and guiding him in every way. That does sound crazy. As crazy as it sounds, it is the core message of the Christian faith. Being a Christian is not primarily about being a nice person, about tending to the poor or advocating for the oppressed; those are the symptoms of being a Christian. Being a Christian is first and foremost belief in a God who we call Father who loves us and claims us as his children eternally. Being a Christian starts with a belief that as Jesus was raised from the dead we too shall be raised. We are in the household of God.

Paul speaks of our relationship with God as one of family; we are children of God, having received a spirit of adoption. We cry “Abba, Father.” And we are heirs along with Jesus Christ. When we frame our relationship with God as a family relationship, we are freed from a lot of fear. Think about it for a minute. What helps a child like Christian grow into a healthy, happy adult is a loving, caring family, because Christian knows that Mom and Dad are going to do their utmost to take care of him. Christian does not have to worry if he fails a spelling test in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, or he upsets a neighbor by hitting a baseball through their dining room window, because Mom and Dad are still going to feed him and make sure that he's healthy, because he's family, and that's what families do. The point of the story of Adam and Eve and the snake in the Garden of Eden is that our sin was the result of us forgetting that we and God are family. We lost our trust in God. We stopped thinking of God as our Father and were tempted to see ourselves as equal with God, as gods ourselves.

And we still struggle to see God as our Father. Even religious folks have problems in their relationship with God, because their pride makes them see God more as the boss man, as Master, as someone to be served, and they compete over who's serving him the best. In my eight years serving here, I have seen a lot of people come and go.

Some come and stay (Halleluiah). Some come and soon leave because their looking for a church that fits their politics or their theology, and they decide this church isn't for them, and that's okay. But what saddens me are the ones who come and leave, or never come at all, because they just don't feel good enough to be part of a church. You know, church people are supposed to be well-mannered, to speak kindly of others and show patience with people, and of course churchy folks never curse. Church folks are supposed to be perfect or damn close to it, and some folks just tell themselves, "Hey, I'm just not that good a person." O if only they knew the pastor! O if only they knew the lay leader, the heads of finance and the Parish Relations committee, the worship leader. Right? The goodness that comes about in our lives is a process that we are all engaged in and none of us have finished. No one here is perfect; some of us are nowhere close to perfect. And when a person decides to stop coming to church because they're not good enough, then they will most likely spend the rest of their lives not feeling good enough, and God as a loving Father does not want his children to go around feeling inadequate or unworthy. **God claims us as his children and therefore we are worthy.**

And what many folks fail to understand is that God wants you to be perfect not to satisfy his own whims but rather **to free you from slavery to sin**. That's right; God wants to set us free, and we in the church are all in the process of becoming freer and freer from sin and more and more a good son or daughter of a loving God. Jesus tells us a parable about a farmer who goes off and hires folks to work in his field. He goes and hires some at 6 a.m., some at 9, some at noon, and some mid-afternoon. At the end of the day they collect their wages, and he begins by paying the ones who started last a full day's wages. He ends up paying all of them a full day's wages, and the ones who worked from sun up to sunset get angry and say why aren't you paying us more? The farmer tells them that they have received a fair wage, and it is the farmer's right to be more generous to some without being unfair to anyone. **Those who worked all day think that they should receive more because they worked longer, just as some people in the church believe that they should be treated more respectfully because they've been a member longer**, and both fail to understand that it doesn't matter if you've been here a day or a hundred years; **it's not about who's more righteous or generous or who's been here longer; we're all family**. Today Christian Zimmer is officially welcomed into the family, a family that extends beyond the walls of this church. As a baptized member of this church Christian becomes a baptized member of ALL churches. And quite frankly Christian is a little young to be laboring in the field, but we are here to love him and affirm him and care for him in every way. We're not keeping track of his sins, and we're not keeping track of our own generosity toward him because we're family, and as children of God we've already been promised eternal life in God's kingdom. Could we possibly want anything more? Could we possibly *receive* anything more?

Wouldn't it be great to have a job where you're not paid according to the hours you work or the amount of work you get done but rather by what your needs are? Some of you may say, "No. I work hard, and I want to receive payment according to my achievements or my hours spent on the job." That may be alright for you right now, but

what if you have an accident? What if you are sick or injured so that you can no longer fulfill your duties as an employee? You'd probably worry about your income. How much am I going to receive now that I can't work? How much of my medical bill is going to be covered by my insurance? What about my mortgage? For that matter, what about my marriage? I would venture to say that you would be living under a cloud of fear if something bad happened to you. And I'm here to tell you that the cause of that fear is a broken relationship with God that has become a broken relationship among all people so that we tend to treat one another as objects, as means to our own ends, rather than as family. As a result we live in fear, fear that we won't be able to "earn" enough to keep us alive and well, fear that we'll lose our job and our possessions. Some folks resort to crime because they feel they can't get enough though honest means and so they need to steal it or kill for it. **That's life according to the flesh, and that kind of living leads to death.** Wouldn't it be nice to know that regardless of what happens to you that your "employer" was going to take care of your every need? Wouldn't it be great to discover that your CEO is actually your father who loves you and cares for you more than anything?

And that's precisely how God intends us to live, and how we ought to live as Christians. Paul writes, "You did not receive a spirit of slavery that you should fall into fear." Fear is what has consumed us since our little mishap in the Garden of Eden; once the man and the woman ate from the fruit that they weren't supposed to eat from, fear consumed them. And fear leads to desperation, and desperation leads to sin. It's true; you think of any sin and behind it you will see fear. Why do people rob from others? They're afraid that their lives will not be happy enough with what they have, and so they must take from others. Why do people insult other people? They are afraid of their own imperfections and how others will judge them, so they put others down to raise themselves up. We do all of these things out of fear because we don't have the assurance anymore that God is with us and that where he is we will also be one day. Because of the broken relationship with God, all we see is the here and now, and our lives are spent trying to procure enough to get us through the here and now.

But when we turn our eyes upon Jesus, what we see is the Living God, the God who flesh cannot destroy, the one who teaches us of God's eternal, fatherly or motherly love that death cannot overcome. And we see that God is willing to do everything to help us see that we are his children no matter what. Today Christian joins the church, and Christian is not perfect and he will not be perfect anytime soon. Our job as a church is to let Christian be Christian, and let him know that he is family, that being perfect is not a requirement here. And as imperfect as we are, we intend to love him to the best of our ability so that he may get a glimpse of a love that is beyond our ability because it's God's love. And when he grows up surrounded by love he will not live in fear. His heart will not be set upon self-adoration but on loving the God who loves him and claims him as his own. That's why we baptize. We want God to know that we know that Christian belongs to him and that we are all in the same family and part of the same household.