

## Romans 8:12-17 – How Then Shall We Live?

Our text today takes us to Romans, chapter 8. Unfortunately, the bright bulbs in charge of the lectionary were a bit dim here, and decided to skip to verse 12, which is a real tragedy since there is all sorts of good stuff in verses 1-11. And, in fact, the good stuff is Gospel good stuff which you need to hear before you get to verse 12, which is something the Holy Spirit and St. Paul knew but the lectionary people seemed to forget. Whenever you see a reading beginning at verse 12, you ought always to ask what was in verses 1-11. Let me tell you.

Chapter 8 begins with this great statement of Gospel clarity, good news for us sinner-saints stuck in this body of death:

**Rom 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

The chapter begins with this great, grand “no condemnation.” There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In Christ, the Law is done, fulfilled. “It is finished.” There is no punishment, no hell, no condemnation. Christ has done it all and taken it all. That’s the starting point for everything else that follows. You cannot fail. You cannot lose. There is no condemnation. The Law has nothing to say to you in Christ. That’s how the Large Catechism can teach that when sin, death, devil, the world, your sinful flesh trouble you, you are to say, “Nevertheless, I am baptized.” “I’m covered. I’m in Christ. There is no condemnation.”

To “**walk according to the Spirit**” is to walk according to faith in Christ, that is, to trust in Christ and not in yourself. Faith is the Spirit’s work, His third article gift worked through water and Word to turn our hearts to God to receive all the good gifts that Jesus has won for us by His dying and rising. This is the Gospel core of it all: God has done for us what the Law could not do because of the sinful flesh. He sent His Son to become Flesh and in the flesh to become sin, so that the Law would be fulfilled in us who trusts in Christ. We uphold the Law by faith in Christ and not by works. This is what is not intuitively obvious to anyone; indeed, you cannot know this by your reason. Reason says you uphold the Law by works, by keeping commandments. But the Spirit teaches something completely different, namely, that you uphold the Law by trusting the One who has fulfilled the Law, that is, Jesus.

And so, to walk according to the flesh, is to walk the way of the Law and works. And to walk according to the Spirit, is to walk the way of the Gospel and faith.

**Rom 8:5-8 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.**

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. That means you as you are in yourself, your “old Adam” cannot please God. The only One who pleases God is Christ. And the only way to please God is to be in Christ. And the only way to be in Christ is by faith in Christ. When our minds are set on the flesh, that is, what we are doing, we will see nothing but sin and death. That is our lot as children of Adam. But when our minds are focused on the things of the Spirit, that is, on Christ and His gifts, then there is life and peace. Our sinful flesh does not willingly submit to God’s law. It needs to be bribed and threatened and coerced, and even then, it cannot do the will of God because it is enslaved to sin. So anything we do in this flesh, whether our speaking, our thinking, our

actions, no matter how holy, no matter how good, no matter how loving, and pious, and pure, cannot please God because the sinful flesh cannot please God.

You see the problem we have. Even when we want to do good, and manage somehow to accomplish it, it's never going to be good enough because our flesh cannot please God and the only way we can do anything is with our flesh. With our flesh we speak, we help, we work, we love. Everything is done in the flesh, and the flesh cannot please God. It is bound to sin and death.

That's why the Christian life looks as herky-jerky weird as it does. Christ wearing an Adam suit is not a pretty sight. Christians who are at once sinful and righteous are not very victorious looking. In fact, quite the opposite. Outwardly, we're wasting away; inwardly, we're being renewed every day. Outwardly, we are dying; inwardly we live. Outwardly, we struggle; inwardly, we are victorious. Outwardly, we are sinners, inwardly, we are saints in Christ. The flesh cannot please God, but the Spirit can and does.

**Rom. 8:9-11 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit which dwells in you.**

This is what it means to be a baptized believer. You no longer live; Christ lives in you. You now live by faith in Christ. Your bodies are, for all intents and purposes "dead because of sin." The best we can expect of this life is to drag that old carcass of Adam along and make him go along with the Christ program. But it's about as clunky as running the latest and greatest software on an old piece of hardware. You are dead and alive and one at the same time. Outwardly dead, inwardly alive. Dead according to the flesh, alive according to the Spirit. And the hope that you have is that just as Christ is raised from the dead, so the same Spirit will raise your mortal bodies, your dead and dying bodies. Your bodies are the Spirit's temple, the dwelling place of Christ. And Christ will never abandon His temple. You take the Spirit to the grave, and from the grave He will raise you. That's our true and certain hope! Nothing less than resurrection from the dead.

**Rom. 8:12-17 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.**

The question is "How then are we going to live?" Are we going to live as debtors to the flesh destined to die? Or are we going to live as debtors to the Spirit destined to live? Know who you are. Know your identity. Know your family of origin. You are sons of God in the Son of God. You have been born anew from above by water and Spirit. You are sons, and if sons, then heirs. That's why we don't say "sons and daughters." Sons means "heirs" in the world of the New Testament. You are heirs. Coheirs with Christ. Your inheritance is nothing less than life from the dead – eternal life now in Christ while you yet live in this body of death, and eternal life in the resurrection when by His Spirit Christ will raise your body to be like His glorious body.

And in the now of faith, we cry out as little children, "Abba, Father." That we pray "Our Father" is the Spirit Himself testifying to our spirit that we are God's children. This is why the Our Father is prayed at every Baptism. The infant, the child, the adult is being given the family prayer, the right and privilege to call upon God as Father through His Son Jesus by the Spirit whom He sends. Our inheritance is heavenly, not earthly. It is life not death. It is freedom not fear. Fear has to do with punishment, but this Father will not punish you. He has sworn it upon the head of His Son who took away the Law. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

There is suffering. Don't miss that important detail. And don't think faith in Christ is a way around suffering. Suffering and glory go hand in hand. We suffer with Christ now so that we will be glorified with Him. But that suffering we endure is not for our ultimate condemnation – there is no condemnation – but for our ultimate and final salvation. The old Adam must be mortified. The flesh must die. Adam must die; Christ must rise. The suffering we experience now is the suffering of the flesh, burdened by sin, bound to the Law, daily dying. But the glory that is to come, the glory of the resurrection, the glory of that day when Christ will call us from the grave and give us the life we already have in Him, that glory far surpasses any suffering we experience in this life.

You are an heir, a child of God, an heir of life destined to rise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever. You are that good soil of which Jesus spoke in the parable, plowed under, ground up, so that the Word would be deeply sown, and sprout and grow and bear fruit to the glory of God.