

Romans 8:12-17 (NIV) For 1-31-2021

“Whose lead do you follow?”

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.¹ And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

¹ In most ancient societies, the first male became the primary heir. “Sonship” here refers to that custom. Regardless of status at birth, through faith in Christ and faithful obedience to him, all can become heirs (children) now.

These verses give crucial facts.

How important is this info?

- **Statistics show the necessity of fastening our vehicle seat belts.**
Countless deaths and injuries result because some don't consider buckling-up essential.
- **Most of us know safety precautions required before we step aboard commercial aircraft.**
We want all to fly safely.
- **We appreciate the importance of properly cooked food.**



The urgency in our text exceeds taking the above- mentioned safety measures.

In verse 12, the word *obligation* points to it.

Do you know all your obligations?

God obliges us not to live as our human nature wants.

At a Pepperdine seminar, the late Theology Professor, Abraham Malherbe of Yale Divinity School, reminded other attendees and me that learning often consists of reviewing things we already know.

Good teachers tell, retell, and remind.

Paul often retold and reminded in his letters.

Call to mind a fact you likely know already.

Last week’s lesson provided evidence of it.

1. When we change our selfish lifestyle and are baptized into Christ, God’s Spirit begins to live in us.

Some teach that at birth, we receive “a spark of the divine.”

The Bible never says that.

Created “in his image” means that we live according to God’s purity and His will.

Colossians 3:9 & 10 plainly tell us:

“Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”

God told Adam, “**You are dust (dirt) and you will return to the dust**” (Genesis 3:19).

You don’t think we are dust?

Dig for ancestors buried more than a hundred years ago, and unless they’re in a glacier, peat bog, or mummified, you’ll find only an occasional bone, but mostly dirt.



The Bible consistently tells us that we created beings are mortal—finite.

We are not divine and do not possess an eternal nature.

Not only that; sin corrupts us and makes us unfit to live with God.

If that’s our condition, what can we do?

On the cross, Jesus redeemed us from our helpless condition and he promised: If we:

- renounce our pride and admit our miserable, desperate condition;
- accept Christ as Lord and Savior in baptism;
- He washes us, cleans us, and forgives us.
- **God then sets us apart for service to Him.**

We’re forgiven, clean, and justified so that we can stand before God.

Only then does God put his Spirit in us.

Imagine a container used to carry filth and waste.

An artist sees potential in that vessel and at great cost buys it, scours, cleans, and polishes it so he can use it for special occasions.

That’s how 1 Corinthians 6:11-13 describes the change which occurs when we change our lifestyle (repent) and follow Christ.

These verses list sins the Corinthians formerly committed that disqualified them for heaven:

“And that is what some of you were. 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.”²

They once behaved by the world’s standards, but they changed, accepted Christ in baptism, and followed Jesus’ lead in obeying God.

The Lord cleaned them and set them apart for special service to Him.

² 1 Corinthians 6:11 NIV



In 2 Corinthians, Paul referred to believers as chosen vessels.³

Unfortunately many followers prefer to remain crackpots.

Because God does more than just clean us in baptism, we’ll leave the pot comparison. When we accept Christ, the Spirit of the Universe Creator begins living in us.

Think of what God has done for us.

God sends His own Holy Spirit to dwell in us.

- **The Spirit present at the “big bang;”**
 - **The Spirit who hovered over earth’s oceans when God first formed them.**
- **The Spirit who carved outer space, where the astronauts presently orbit and beyond;**
 - **And inner space where microbiologists and nuclear scientists probe using the latest technology to investigate such phenomena as electrons spinning around the tiniest atoms.**

³ See 2 Corinthians 4.

While we short-time mud balls live on earth, the Lord gives us a chance for something better.

God’s Eternal Spirit wants to live in you and bring you to everlasting life.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” You are not your own; you were bought at a price.

Therefore honor God with your body.”⁴

2. What obligation do we owe God’s Spirit?

Most organizations require members to:

- **Pay dues.**
 - **Attend meetings.**
- **Obey laws.**
 - **Keep their memberships active.**

Many view church membership by those criteria.

- **Attend church when it’s convenient.**
 - **Make your annual pledge.**
- **Serve on a committee or two.**
 - **Obey most church regulations.**



Many see their responsibility to the Lord from the above perspective.

Our Spirit obligation might involve some of the above, yet we owe a far greater debt.

What obligation do we owe God’s Spirit?

Recall: Jesus found us in a desperate condition. He pulled us from the rubbish heap, redeemed us, cleaned us, set us apart for special service, and then sent his Holy Spirit to live in us.

We’re obligated to follow the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

God’s people follow the Spirit’s instructions.

How does the Spirit direct us?

The Spirit doesn’t overpower us as some think. We’re not on autopilot.

We never lose our independence as persons.

The language in our text clearly compares the Spirit’s guidance to one person advising another.⁵

⁵ *Critical & Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, by Sanday & Headlam, p 202.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 NIV

“We have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it.”

We dirt clods come loaded with lots of natural inclinations.

- If someone insults us or injures us, we often focus on vengeance, not forgiveness.
- Money becomes more important to us than serving God and helping others.
- Greed, lust, and power struggles break up friendships, families, and nations.

We see it occurring today in our country.

If we keep doing these things, we die.

The Holy Spirit speaks life to us several ways:

First, He guides us through the Scriptures.

Some might be thinking:

“Bob, you are getting weird. The Holy Spirit doesn’t talk to people like that.”

The Bible says, “Yes, he does.”

Ephesians 6:17 NIV tells how Christians prepare for life’s tests:

“Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”



When we read the Bible with the right attitude, God’s Spirit speaks to us.

If the Scriptures advise us, it’s as if the Holy Spirit instructs us.

We save loads of anxiety and headaches by starting each day reading God’s Word.

God also speaks to us through authorities.

- **If you are a child and your parents tell you to do something, chances are the Holy Spirit is speaking through them.**

The Bible tells children to obey their parents in the Lord.⁶

Hebrews 13:17 advises us to “obey your spiritual leaders.”

Romans 13:1 tells us to submit to governmental authorities.

“Hold on a minute Bob,” you say,

“Suppose my parent or my teacher or my government orders me to injure someone or to do something wrong.”

⁶ Ephesians 6: 1

Those examples illustrate why we need to daily read God’s Word and prayerfully discern it.

God obliges us to follow His Word and Spirit. His Word does not always conform to society’s expectations or political correctness.

“Jesus said, ‘If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”⁷

God’s Spirit and His Word never disagree.

At times, as Joshua did, we must choose whether we shall follow God or society’s influence.

3) “Those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.”

God’s Spirit always counsels in accordance with God’s Word.

This week I pray that all of us will spend time praying for the wisdom, courage, and judgment to live according to God’s will.

Welcome God’s Spirit to take full charge.



Nothing in the world equals being in God’s family.

No relationship comes close.

When temptation beckons, we remember:

God is our father.

The great scholar and church leader Ambrose helped Augustine of Hippo overcome his intellectual problems with belief in God.

For years, however, Augustine struggled with sexual sin and invoked the famous prayer:

“Lord, give me chastity, but not yet.”

Augustine “recalled “the torment *of* his life when he was torn by the tug of the flesh toward the too vivid memory *of* his mistresses over against the quiet call of the Spirit *of* God. He *was* in Milan, sitting on a bench under a fig tree, his Bible open, but his vision dimmed by tears. He heard the voice *of* a boy or girl--he did not know which—calling out from a neighboring house:

‘Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.’

⁷ John 8:31, 32 NIV

“The voice was not, of course, addressed to Augustine; no doubt children were calling to one another in a game. Augustine, having stirred at the sound of a voice breaking his solitude, returned to the bench where he had left his Bible. He picked it up and read it.

“The passage before him was **Romans 13: 13, 14**. As he read, he was flooded by the light of full certainty as the gloom of doubt vanished.”⁸

When Augustine picked up his Bible, he read this:

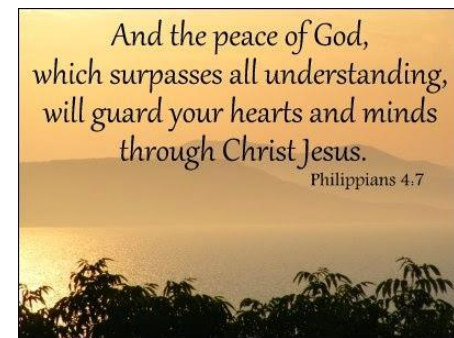
**“Let us behave decently, as in the daytime,
not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual
immorality and debauchery,
not in dissension and jealousy.
Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus
Christ, and do not think about how to gratify
the desires of the sinful nature.”**

**Our loving Father and Creator
calls us to live by His word and Spirit.**

**“If you live according to the sinful nature, you
will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death
the misdeeds of the body, you will live,
because those who are led by the Spirit of God
are children of God.”**

**God’s Spirit invites you right now.
“Pick up your Bible and read it!”**

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⁸ Book 8, chapter 12, of *Confessions*, Augustine, as quoted in *OVERHEARING THE GOSPEL*, Craddock, Fred B. p. 107