

Heirs, Not Errors – Romans 8:12-17

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Apologize

1. I want to begin with an *apology*. I want to *apologize* to those of you who've *resisted* becoming a Christian,
 - a. Not because you disagree with the message,
 - b. But because of the *messengers*.
2. I want to apologize for *2 things*.
3. **First** – I want to apologize for “*Professors*.” → Not college instructors.
 - a. I mean people who *profess* to be Christians but have no evidence of a life-change.
 - b. They are all talk, no walk.
 - c. They may go to church now & then or have a fish emblem on their SUV; but there's no solid evidence of faith there.
 - d. If what's kept you from coming to Jesus is the shoddy example of some who *call* themselves Christians, I/we apologize.
 - e. And I ask you to pay close attention to the study today because it speaks to this issue of the *lifestyle* of the follower of Christ.
4. **Second** – I apologize for “*Churchianity*.”
 - a. I apologize for the confusion we've spread by adding to the Gospel & putting unnecessary barriers in the way of you coming to God.
 - b. In the modern American *version* of Christianity, we've given the impression the Gospel is little more than a *religious sales pitch* & people are tired of it.
 - c. We've turned *evangelism* into a *church-growth program*.
 - d. The invitation, “Come to Christ” has become synonymous with “Come to Church.”
 - e. And what THAT means is: **Be like us!**
 - Dress & talk like this.
 - Watch *only* these movies.
 - Read these books.
 - Listen to this music.
 - Sing *only* these songs.
 - Vote *this* way.
 - f. But outsiders look at the *visible* church, at the *goofy caricature* of it they see on TV, or hear about from its *critics* on radio & in the press & say, “I don't want to be a part of *that!*”
 - g. They think popular culture's mockery of the church is legit & say, “That's not anything I want to be.”
 - h. What *hurts* is when some *in* the Church *contribute* to that embarrassing image.
 - 1) Thursday night I was channel surfing & flipped to a religious station.
 - 2) My first thought was that the program was a *parody*.
 - 3) But no—it was the real thing; they were sincere.
 - 4) The young singing group that was leading the audience was no doubt well-meaning,
 - 5) But their clothes, hair, & songs looked & sounded like they'd just stepped out of the early 80's.
 - 6) When I first turned to it I thought that it was a Hollywood satire, a comedy poking fun at Christians.
 - i. If I was an unbeliever & thought becoming a Christian meant becoming THAT → I'd have no interest whatsoever. On the contrary, I'd *shun* the Gospel.

- j. But “Come to Christ” does *not* mean “Join a church.”
- k. *Christianity* is **NOT** *Churchianity*.
- l. Being a follower of Christ is something very different,
- m. And while the Church is *an important part* of the life of faith, the *real* Church is not the gross, silly, irrelevant, sad caricature many have of it.
- n. That too is dealt with in what we find in our text today.

II. TEXT

A. V. 12

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

1. Note that Paul writes this *to believers* & says they are *debtors*.
 2. That’s a surprise because he’s already made it clear that at the Cross Jesus paid our debt in full.
 3. *This debt* comes as a *result* of Christ’s work.
 - a. This debt is what *gratitude* & an appreciation for the Cross lays on us.
 - b. This isn’t an obligation we resist or regret; it’s a delight & joy.
 4. This obligation isn’t to the old way of living, since we’ve died to that. We owe the flesh nothing!
 5. What we *do* have an obligation to, is the Spirit who comes to impart the life of Christ to us.
 6. In light of what Christ has done so that we might live, how can we do anything other than go after that life with all we’ve got?
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7. Steven Spielberg is a master at the art of telling a story thru film.
 - a. At the beginning of *Saving Private Ryan*, the now elderly Ryan is visiting a cemetery in France where American soldiers killed during WWII are buried.
 - b. He’s standing at the grave of Captain John Miller who’d led a squad through great peril to tell Ryan he was being sent home to safety.
 - c. Tears fill his eyes as he thinks back to what had taken place over 50 years earlier.
 - d. When Miller’s squad finally found Ryan he refused to leave his buddies until they finished their mission of defending a bridge.
 - d. So the captain & his squad stayed to help them.
 - e. But in the final battle, Capt. Miller & most of his squad were killed.
 - f. As Miller sat on the now secured bridge, his back propped up against a broken down jeep, breathing his last breaths, he looked up at Ryan & spoke his last words, “Earn this.”
 - g. The camera moves to the young Ryan’s battle weary faced, which slowly morphs through time to the present day elderly man standing in a French cemetery over Miller’s grave.
 - h. As the tears flow, his wife walks to his side with a look of concern.
 - i. Ryan turns to her & with desperation asks, “Tell me I’m a good man.”
 - j. From that day on that bridge forward, Miller’s challenge had been Ryan’s *obligation* to live a life worthy of the sacrifice so many had made so he could go home safely.
 8. In light of what Christ has done to free us from bondage to sin, how we can do other than *extend* that freedom as far as it can go.
 9. Freedom in the Spirit brings an Obligation for Liberation.

B. V. 13

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.

1. This call to live in & by the Spirit instead of the flesh is repeated over & over in Paul’s letters.
2. It’s one of his most common themes because he knew well the struggle we face living in a fallen world.

- a. It's in rebellion against God & opposes those who follow Him.
- b. The world, flesh, & devil *conspire* to trip us up in our walk with Christ.
3. So Paul takes every opportunity to remind us to *set our minds* on the Spirit, not the flesh.

4. He knew from past experience that as he taught on the Grace of God, some jumped to the wrong conclusion that holiness wasn't important.
5. They assumed that as long as they had faith, God was just tickled pink with them & it didn't matter what they did.
6. So Paul added these verses to make it *clear* that Grace is no excuse to live a morally sloppy life.
7. It's not a license to sin. Grace is no *hall-pass to trespass*.
8. **On the contrary** – Jesus' not only paid the *legal debt* of our sin – He *freed us from sin itself*.
9. What else can we do but run as far *from it* as possible?

10. During the Civil War, when Lincoln signed the *Emancipation Proclamation* – the slaves were *technically* free.
 - a. The South tried to secede from the Union, but the Federal Government refused to grant secession & declared the South in rebellion.
 - b. A war was fought to put that rebellion down & preserve the Union.
 - c. Because the South was *legally* still part of the United States, all slaves in the Southern States were *in fact*, free!
 - d. All they needed to do to *apply* that freedom was to get away from the Southern states & find refuge in the North.
 - e. But some slaves were so blind to the reality of their freedom, they took up arms & fought on the side of the South!
11. Sadly some who call themselves “Christians” do the same.
12. When they ought to be running *from* sin, they instead run *to* it.

13. So – if you're not a Christian, as I said earlier, I apologize if you've been burned by those who claim to be Christians but they haven't given much if any evidence of the truth of that.
14. Yes, there are some *fakers & frauds* who make the claim but in reality aren't saved.
15. There are also a lot of *new believers* who've only gotten a start & still have a lot of rough edges.
16. There are some who've been saved for a long time but haven't made much progress.
17. And then there are a whole lot of believers who've seen God make amazing changes in them. They still have a long way to go, but if you knew what He'd already done you'd know it was nothing less than a miracle.
18. The point is – Paul spells out here what all those who claim the name of Christ ought to be about.

C. V. 14

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons [children] of God.

1. This *leading of the Spirit* refers to the previous verses.
2. It's a *progressive work* of the Spirit about what we need to lay down & how we can grow more into the likeness of Christ, which is precisely the direction the Holy Spirit is taking us.
3. Listen, there is no growth *toward* God without *distance* from sin.
4. Think of it this way, if I'm in LA but want to go to Santa Barbara, there's no way to get *to* SB without getting *away* from LA.
 - a. Every mile *closer* to SB is a mile *farther* from LA.
 - b. I don't know about you, but when I'm driving somewhere, I find it easier & safer to look *forward* than backward.
 - c. When driving to SB, I'm *concentrating on the destination*, how many miles there are yet to go, not how many I've already gone.

- d. We gain distance from the past by moving with purpose toward the future.
5. As we follow Christ, the Holy Spirit points us in the right direction & shows us how to get there.
6. It's an undeniable, indisputable truth that the closer we are to God, the farther we'll be from sin.
7. **BUT** – Returning to our driving analogy, we *could* get away farther from LA *without* getting any closer to SB.
 - a. If we traveled *east*, or *south*, or *west* we could put distance between us & LA.
 - b. But we'd also be getting *farther* from SB.
 - c. That's what *religious self-effort* accomplishes.
 - d. It simply exchanges *obvious sins* for a more subtle but no less damning variety, while filling us with a sense of *self-righteousness*.
 - e. *Bakersfield* is *not* where we ought to be headed. SB is.
 - f. *Religion* is a spiritual Bakersfield, & it's not what the Holy Spirit has in mind for us.
 - g. His goal is to make us more like Jesus so our intimacy with God can be greater & more rewarding.
8. Because we're the children of God, the Spirit's desire is to lead us *home* & home is where the Father is.
9. Paul now speaks of our new identity as sons & daughters of God.

D. Vs. 15-17

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

1. Salvation makes a fundamental & dramatic change in our *identity*.
2. We go from being the objects of God's wrath to His beloved children.
3. The Holy Spirit who comes to indwell & empower us, liberates us from the fear that haunts the lost.
4. Unbelievers have a great fear of death because they know *intuitively* it forever seals their fate.
 - a. The fear of death & the judgment after is so great it's driven a large part of what we call history.
 - b. Facing the inevitability of death terrifies people so badly they do any & everything they can to cope.
 - c. They make up religions & philosophies to talk themselves out of fear.
 - d. Or they immerse themselves in endless distractions like pursuing success & pleasure.
5. Some deal with the fear of death & judgment through *bluster*; they act all *tough & macho* – afraid of nothing. They even defy death – but it's all a show.
6. Slavery to sin *is* bondage to death & fear.
7. But Jesus has set us free from sin & put eternal life within us.
8. We'll never stand before the judgment of God & have been forever liberated from His wrath.
9. We need never cry out in fear, but instead are *blessed* to be able to cry something else.
10. "*Abba*" is a word Jesus borrowed from the Aramaic language because neither Hebrew nor Greek had a word that could express what He wanted to say while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane.
 - a. It's a warm, personal, tender word that a trusting child uses when speaking to his/her father.
 - b. It's "daddy, papa."
 - c. When Karesse was small, she called me "Poppy." It was her special word just for me when she'd sit in my lap & I'd read to her or we'd just cuddle.
11. Oh Christian, do you see what Paul is saying?
 - a. God is not some terrifying judge before Whom we cower in terror.
 - b. He's our Daddy Who calls us into His lap for cuddles.
12. In 2 Timothy 1:7, Paul says --
God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.
13. 1 John 4:18 says –

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear.

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14. Can you think of any place *safer* than God's lap?
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15. Paul uses a potent image here to get across just how dear we are to God.
16. We aren't *just* God's kids, we're His *adopted* sons & daughters.
17. Adoption doesn't have anywhere near the same meaning for us it did among the Romans.
18. Under Roman Law, the father had *paterfamilias* = *absolute legal authority* over all members of his family & household.
- His word was unquestioned & enforced by Roman Law.
 - He decided who & how much of the inheritance his descendants received.
 - If he had no heir or thought his natural children were undeserving of carrying on the family name & fortune,
 - He'd investigate the available young men who weren't in a position to inherit anything from their fathers, who'd died in battle or lost their land to creditors.
19. So a wealthy man looking for an heir investigated who of these landless young guys demonstrated the character he was looking for.
- Finding someone he deemed worthy, the father would then offer to adopt him.
 - It was a great honor to be adopted because it meant receiving an honorable name & a new identity.
 - The adoption process began with a total severing of the young man's legal & social responsibilities of his prior life.
 - Then with great ceremony he was brought in to the new family.
 - The adopting father then announced his full acceptance of the new son by announcing before witnesses his new name, *adding* the family name to it.
 - After that, anyone trying to attach the old obligations or problems to the adopted son would be confronted by the witnesses who would affirm *that person* no longer existed; this man was *not* that man.
20. Paul uses adoption as a picture of our new relationship with God, not because we were doing well & God decided we ought to be on His team. God didn't adopt us because we were worthy.
21. He uses adoption because of the *incredible favor & blessing* it speaks of.
22. In Christ, what we were died & now in the Spirit we are new creatures.
23. Rev 2 says we get a *new name* to which is *added* the *family name* of God. [Eph 3:15]
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- ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**
24. Under Jewish law, truth was established by the testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses.
25. Both God's Spirit & our spirit unite to confirm that we truly are born again & have become the sons & daughters of God.
- ¹⁷and if [since] children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,**
26. In Earthly relationships, an inheritance is only given on the death of the owner.
27. It's by virtue of Christ's death we gain ours.
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28. Some of the reality shows on TV track the lives of the rich & privileged.
- I'm no fan of reality shows but I do occasionally watch them just to see what they're about.
 - Okay, it's just shocking what some of those spoiled brats do & say!
 - Born into incredible wealth & luxury they whine & moan over the silliest things.
 - A lot of young people watch those shows & wish they'd been born to such privilege.
29. We have! We've been born-again to it & adopted into God's family where all God has becomes ours!
- Hebrews 1:2 says Jesus is the heir of all things.
 - Here Paul says we are *joint-heirs* / *co-heirs* with Christ.
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30. A family moved to a new community & went to church for the first time.
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- a. They had 2 boys who went to their Sunday school class.
- b. The teacher asked their names & ages.
- c. They both said they were 7, so she asked for their birthdates.
- d. 1 said April 8th & the other said April 20th
- e. When the teacher told them that was *impossible* they said, “One of us is adopted.”
- f. The teacher asked “Which one?” But the boys just looked at each other & said,
- g. “We asked Dad once but he said he loved us both & couldn't remember any more which one was adopted.”

31. Adoption brings us into God's family, but once we're in – *we're ALL the way in.*

32. Now → there's a *balance* to all this -

if [since] indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

33. We're not in heaven yet. We still live in the midst of a fallen, rebellious world that hates God & all who follow Him.

34. Jesus warned us that aligning with Him would mean the world's hatred & abuse.

35. When it comes, which it inevitably will, instead of freaking out & getting all upset, wondering why God would let such happen to us, wear it as a badge of honor!

36. To suffer for the sake of Christ hones our longing for home.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Began with Apology

1. I began today with an apology to those who've resisted coming to faith in Christ because the modern American version of the Gospel has confused Christianity with Churchianity.
2. In vs. 14-17 we get a *partial* glimpse of what God intends the Church to be—His family.
3. It ought to simply be His adopted sons & daughters, enjoying their inheritance & using it to bring blessing to others.
4. As they do that faithfully, it will mark them as different from the world which doesn't like anyone getting out of line, so it reacts badly.

B. Not Perfect, But on the Way

1. So, I apologize that some of us have gotten off track & have turned church into something other than what the Gospel calls for.
2. Don't miss out on the Gospel's great offer by stumbling at the problems with the church.