

Romans 8:12-25

12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.

13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 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.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

24 Jesus told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed ears, then the weeds also appeared.

27 'The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?"

28 "An enemy did this," he replied. 'The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?"

29 "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling up the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn."

36 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, 'Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.'

37 He answered, 'The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the people of the kingdom. The weeds are the people of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

40 'As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age.

41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears, let them hear.

Led by the Spirit

Romans 8:12-25; Matthew 13:24-30; 36-43

I'm going to start by going back to the end of last week's reading because you need to include it if you want to understand this Romans passage.

9 You, however, [believers] are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

So Paul is saying that if you are a christian you will have within you the Spirit of Christ.

When I was 19 I'd been in church all my life and I'd heard the gospel preached many times, but I now know that I had no understanding of it. (not everyone's experience) At one moment in 1973, which I would identify as my 'conversion' (although it's a horrible word), I was given understanding. This is the gift of God, that we come to know Jesus, and *supernaturally* we receive the Holy Spirit. **v9 If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ**

Now of course I didn't understand everything, and I can't explain it, I just knew that what I'd been hearing all my life was true, and I *knew* I was a christian. That much has never changed since.

So what *makes* you a christian? Not praying. Not going to church. Not good deeds. Although these are all desirable things to do. Not anything we do to try and reach God.

What makes you a christian is that transaction when we say God I need you. I can't do it without you. You put your faith in Jesus, you are given the Holy Spirit. I can't explain how this happens, but you just *know* when it does.

Hopefully if we understand this, we can understand what Paul is saying about the flesh, or as it's also translated here, the sinful nature. Which is basically just describing our tendency as human beings to get things wrong. However you want to describe it, we all know it to be an inescapable fact.

The bible just calls it sin, and we don't like to admit it really, we mostly think we're OK.

13 For if you live according to the flesh [sinful nature], you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

And the Holy Spirit *if we allow Him*, gives us the ability to begin to live according to His nature, instead of letting things slide as is our usual tendency. There is disagreement about this verse but what Paul is saying here and what the bible does teach is that physical death is the result of sin.

And so if the Holy Spirit lives in us we will not die. Well, we will die a physical death, but eternal life, life with an eternal dimension to it, begins with the gift of the Spirit given by God. When Paul says 'you will live' it obviously means something different to our present life - we are all 'alive'. But we are not just a collection of cells, we are all physical and spiritual beings and the two things are indivisible. 'You will live' here means live in relation to and response to God which was His intention for us when He created us. Life without the Spirit who made us is a lesser thing than it could be, because the spiritual aspect of who we are is as equally important as the physical.

18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

So this is what we can expect from God, but what is the glory that will be revealed in us? And why should we want it? We all probably get something different from faith in God, but we all, I think, have a feeling of longing for something beyond what we enjoy here and now, that there must be something better, especially if our lives are not at all enjoyable, or in so many cases a nightmare. C.S. Lewis preached a sermon called The Weight of Glory in 1942 in which he said this:

Glory means....acceptance by God, response, acknowledgement, and welcome into the heart of things. The door on which we have been knocking will open at last. And Lewis also points out:

1 Cor 8:3 *Whoever loves God is known by God repeat*

So I think glory is that indescribable thing we feel is missing, that we can never quite put our finger on, but is to be found at the end of the journey we all start on when we follow Jesus. In fact it's the very presence of God, which is only really briefly glimpsed, and once you have, you realise it's what you've always been searching for.

24 hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

Our search isn't satisfied by spiritual experiences, by great worship or amazing sermons or prayer times, because the object of our search is not church or peace of mind or whatever but God himself, and so kingdom or church activity is, or should be, about growth in discipleship, and encouraging one another, and building each other up, as well as going out with the message. We're often unsatisfied, we want quick results, but it's not a short term commitment. As Paul says, it takes patience and persistence. Jesus' parable of the weeds, which we also heard, fits very well with this theme of patience. You often hear the complaint that God doesn't do anything about bad things happening in the world, and the church is somehow implicated in this oversight on God's part. If God is so powerful why doesn't He prevent all the death and war? Here Jesus gives a picture of what the reality is. The kingdom of God is like this: a field in which there is wheat and there are weeds.

The good and the bad exist alongside each other. In the kingdom of God! The servants can't wait for nature to take its course, and want to pull up all the weeds, and half the wheat with them, but God waits for the harvest to come to fruition. God makes the judgement call and not us, or else the good and bad alike are destroyed. Evil will be defeated, in fact it already has been, at the cross, but the Kingdom of God is still in process and only the Creator has the answers as to what the right time is to bring about the end of all things, when there will be no more pain. To go back to Paul, there's a much bigger picture here and to think we're the centre of it all is to miss what's going on. The bible teaches that *heaven and earth* will be renewed, much as this goes against our fuzzy ideas of everyone drifting around in heaven for ever. Jesus returned from death with a body, in some ways the same, in some ways more real. Look at verses 20-21 **For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.** Heaven and earth will be remade.

Our hope is to be led by the Spirit in everything we do and not by our own wisdom. That's the way to the real fulfilment we all long for. Let's pray. *Pray for patience to wait for guidance and courage to act on it. For filling with the Holy Spirit and equipping to take the gospel out to our villages.*