

Children of God in still-sinful bodies

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[0 : 01] But please turn, if you would, to these verses in the first half of Romans chapter 8, which are all about what it means to be children of God in still sinful bodies.

How can God be truly good and all-powerful when the world is so full of suffering and wickedness and sheer futility? And how can your so-called gospel be so good, such good news and powerful to change people, when the church all through history has been littered with rank hypocrisy and scandals?

Answer me that. Sort of thing that your hostile atheist student friend might say when you ask them if they might want to come to church or perhaps read the Bible with you.

Maybe if they're in a rather nasty mood, they'll add something like this for good measure. And anyway, you're not so perfect yourself, are you? And don't forget who it was that got a bit indulged with too much drink at that end-of-term party and made a bit of a fool of themselves.

And off they go laughing. And off you go, rather downcast, your head drooping. Those kind of questions niggle in the back of our minds, don't they?

[1 : 20] We know the gospel. We believe the gospel. These great truths in Romans that tell us about the reality of our redemption in Christ and our rescue from our old humanity in Adam into Christ, free from the dominion of sin and death into the realm where grace reigns in life through Jesus Christ.

We know that. And yet, the fact is, we still live in a world of suffering and death. And we still live in bodies of sin and death.

And we do falter. And we do sin. We can't deny it. Some Christians try to deny it. But an honest Christian surely has to say with Paul in Romans chapter 7 that whenever I try and do good, there I find evil is right there with me.

And often I do feel wretched. And we also get sick as Christians. And we die. Again, some Christians have liked to pretend that that's not so or ought not to be so.

They expect all kinds of miraculous healings as the norm for true, faithful Christians. But friends, the reality is just not so.

[2 : 37] There are just as many funerals and just as many burials in the churches that teach those things as everywhere else. And so we've got to be honest, haven't we?

Believers still sin. And believers still die. And at times that reality just weighs us down. And we doubt.

We doubt sometimes that the faith is rational and true. Or we doubt that our own personal faith is real and genuine. There's something perhaps wrong with us.

Especially if we've been struggling with something particular in our life. Isn't that right? Maybe some habit that's been such a battle to overcome. Or maybe it's the pain, the real pain of a relative.

Perhaps a spouse. A parent. A parent. He's been a solid believer for years. But through illness or through bereavement or something else seems to have lost all conscious sense of God's love and his presence.

[3 : 39] And we're perplexed. We wonder what that means. Maybe one of many, many other things that rock us and that shock us.

And make us wonder whether we can really be sure that what God has told us is true. And that we are, in fact, a child of God. That everything he's promised really will be, as he said.

I'm sure all of us have felt those things at times. Maybe some of us feel like that this very day. Well, that is why we need these middle chapters of the letter to the Romans.

And especially this chapter, chapter 8. Which is all about exactly these issues. About our assurance of our faith. Because here again, Paul is telling us that this life of tension and paradox and

frustration is exactly what we should expect.

Given the sheer wonder of the gospel that he's unfolding to us. Because in the gospel of God, what God is doing for us is far, far, far more than just making this world a better place.

[4 : 51] And making Christians better people in it. Although, of course, it does that and must do that. No, this gospel is telling us that in Christ, God is remaking the whole universe.

The whole cosmos. And he's remaking us. Not merely to be reformed characters in this world, but to be reborn. Resurrected human beings for a whole remade world.

No longer ultimately feeble and fallen. No longer in Adam. But a truly, wholly fulfilled new humanity in Jesus Christ.

In a new world. It is as big as that. We're being saved. And this whole universe, Paul says, is being saved for eternal life.

Not just for an improved mortal life here on earth. But this full salvation, he's told us many times, is not yet. It's assured through what Christ has done for us once and for all in his justifying work.

[5 : 52] We've seen that as early as chapter 5. We have already got peace with God, says Paul. We are no longer under condemnation for the guilt of our sin. We stand now in grace.

And therefore, much more, says Paul in Romans 5, 9. Shall we be saved by God from the wrath to come on the day of judgment? When he comes at last to make this whole universe new.

And so we rejoice in hope, in certain hope, says Paul, of the glory of God that is to come. But in the meantime, until that day, he said to us in chapter 5, verse 5, that the Holy Spirit has been poured into our hearts.

And indeed, he is the ever-present assurance that although we live in bodies still tainted by grievous sin, and in a world still tainted by grievous suffering and death, we are children of God. And what he has promised will never fail us, and it can never fail those who belong to the risen Lord Jesus by faith. It's the work of the Spirit of Christ in us, in our hearts, that brings home to us and makes real to us, in our personal experience, the assurance of the sacrifice of Christ for us in history.

[7 : 19] That we are true sons of God by faith. And that's what this chapter, chapter 8 of Romans, this assurance now, unfolds for us.

It picks up from chapter 7, verse 6, which speaks of this newness in the Spirit, this life free from the law's condemnation, and therefore free from sin's powerful dominion.

And it explains what this means, first of all, in terms of a new life that is still lived out in sinful bodies. The key verse, really, is verse 10.

Our bodies are dead still because of sin. And then, from verses 18 to 39, in terms of how this new life is lived out now, in a still suffering world.

A creation still in bondage to decay. So today we're going to look at verses 1 to 17, and the assurance that we have by the indwelling Spirit of God, that we are children of God.

[8 : 18] And although we must live in still sinful bodies, and in a still sinful nature, until at last we're raised up in resurrection bodies, we are His.

And the promise is there, verse 11, those resurrection bodies, and verse 17, of the glory of what that's going to mean. But first of all then, look at verses 1 to 4.

When we feel condemned by the struggle of our sinfulness, Paul says we can have great assurance when we understand the completeness of the new life that is ours in the Spirit.

The completeness of that newness of life. However fearful, however feeble and vulnerable and doubtful we may often feel, we can have great reassurance, Paul says, because God Himself has executed decisive change for us and in us.

And so our liberation from sin is complete, not through what we have done, but through what God has done. Verse 1, there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, none at all, because we are released not only from the guilt of our sin, but also from the power, from the dominion, from the control, from the mastery of the power of sin.

[9 : 51] That's what chapters 6 and 7 have all been about. And that explains why Paul comes back again at this stage to remind us of the sheer completeness of what God's justifying grace has done for us in Christ.

As long ago as chapter 5, verse 1, we saw plainly, as we said, that those who are justified by faith have peace with God. That is, we're no longer condemned for the guilt of our sin.

But as chapter 7 showed us so plainly last time, we are still all too conscious of the presence of our sin, aren't we? And indeed, of the potency of sin remaining in our sinful nature and warring against us.

And so we constantly do feel frustrated. What wretched man I am! I can't do all that I want to do and be all that I want to be. Yes, we are, like Paul in verse 25, we are willing servants of God with our minds and yet we still have to live with this sinful nature, with our flesh.

And that means so often we feel condemned, don't we? On the wall of my study I have a little card with a number of short prayers from the Psalms.

[11:10] I pray, open my eyes that I may see wonderful things out of thy law. Incline my heart to your testimonies and not to selfish gain.

But so often when I want these things to be true of my life, evil is right there with me. The devil is right there with me. And I don't incline my heart always to the things of God.

And the enemy holds up that very verse, that very law of God that I've been praying and he says, ha, you're condemned by your own prayers. Aren't you? But no.

No, says Paul. There is no condemnation. Sin no longer has any power or any right to use God's law against you in that way, to condemn you.

It cannot because, look back to chapter 7 verse 6, it cannot because we are released from the law. We died to that which held us captive so that we serve not any longer in the oldness of the letter that condemned our sin in that way, but in the newness of the Spirit that possesses our hearts so that we serve truly as slaves to God, bearing fruit not any longer for death, but bearing fruit for God.

[12:33] You see, that means that as verse 2 of chapter 8 says, the law of God is no longer to me a law of sin and death. It cannot be exploited in the hands of sin against me to accuse me and to condemn me.

Rather, it's become for us who are in Christ the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We're liberated for the true life of faith. And which, as Paul said in chapter 7, we delight in the law of God in our inner being, in our minds and in our hearts.

We're liberated from the law's condemnation, which is all the law can do to us in the hands of sin.

And we're liberated for the law's consummation. All that God promised to do through the ministry of his Spirit and the hearts of those he would call to be his true children in the new covenant.

Jeremiah 31 and Ezekiel 36, I will write it on your hearts by my Spirit. Now, how has this happened? Well, we know it has happened because Paul said it several times.

Chapter 6, verse 2, we died to sin's power. Chapter 6, verse 7, we've been set free from sin's power. We're no longer under sin's dominion. Chapter 7, verse 4, we died to the law through the body of Christ and so on.

[13:55] But here, in chapter 8, verses 3 and 4, we have it perhaps more clearly than anywhere else in this whole letter. How has this liberation happened?

It has happened, says Paul, because God himself executed judgment upon the power of sin. Sin really, there's a capital S here.

Notice, it's not sins, plural. It is sin. It is the dark power that Paul has been describing all the way through these chapters in such personal terms. The reigning power, the tyrannical master, the brutal employer, the evil exploiter of God's law, the seditious fifth columnist that remains present even in our redeemed persons, in our flesh.

God himself has condemned sin, not only in passing a verdict on it, but in executing the judgment upon that power.

God's law can't condemn us any longer for, look at verse 3, God has done what the law, good and holy as it is, could not do because it was weakened by our sinful flesh, our sin.

[15:07] But God himself, look carefully, in the person of his Son has come in the flesh, in real flesh, but not sinful flesh. Notice, it's very carefully put in the likeness of sinful flesh, fully man, but without sin, for sin, to deal with sin.

He dealt with sin in his own flesh. A second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came. It's not sin in the flesh that's condemned here.

Our Bibles are unhelpful in the word order. It's God in the flesh, in Jesus Christ, who condemned sin. Now, Paul isn't talking here about Christ's atonement for our sins.

It's not our sins that are condemned here. It's sin itself as a power. Of course, that means, behind that power, the author of sin itself, the devil.

John 12 and 31, Jesus said, now is the judgment on this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. Hebrews chapter 2, verse 14, uses very similar language as Paul does here about Christ taking flesh that, quote, through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were held in lifelong bondage.

[16 : 35] He condemned, he executed judgment on the power of sin and death. He's not talking about something different from Christ's atoning death for our sin.

He's suddenly not giving us some alternative explanation to try and avoid penal substitution. If you think that's what I'm doing, listen to what we said about Romans 3, verse 25. No, but what Paul is focusing on here is simply another dimension of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

But it's one that Paul knows is absolutely vital if Christian assurance is going to be deep within our hearts. We need to know that in our union with Christ and his death and his resurrection we are liberated not only from the penalty of our sin, not only from sin's guilt before God's law, but because we are, therefore we are also inevitably liberated from the power of sin and indeed the personality of sin, the devil himself.

We are saved in Christ's death from the fruits of sin and from the root of sin and also from the brute of sin, as William Stowe used to put it.

And that must be because sin and death has no power to judge and condemn us on their own, only insofar as they can accuse us before God's law and demand our condemnation from God.

[18 : 02] But through Christ's death in our place that power is gone forever. Turn to Colossians chapter 2 and verse 14 and 15.

There's just a very helpful couple of verses that that explicate this. In Colossians 2 14, Paul says that God has cancelled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. That is Christ's atoning death for our sins. And thereby, verse 15, because he has done that, he has dismissed, disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

He has condemned the power of sin over us. He breaks the power of cancelled sin and therefore sets the prisoner free, as Charles Wesley put it.

And he has in his own flesh as man, in Christ, condemned sin, the power that held us in bondage. He's disarmed sin. He's liberated us from every last vestige of the condemning power of sin.

[19 : 20] And the result is there in verse 4. He saved us from sin's condemning power and for well, for wholehearted union with our new master, our new husband, the risen Lord Jesus.

That's how chapter 6 and 7 put it. But here, he puts it like this. Verse 4, he condemns sin 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.

Now, the scholar's getting a bit of a fankel and a tangle about this verse and what it means, but I think it helps a lot if we keep in mind the big picture of Paul's whole argument through this letter to the Romans. He's telling us again and again that righteousness is not by works, but is by faith from first to last.

He's telling us, isn't he, that that's how it's been right from the very beginning. That's what God's law has always been about. It's a law of faith, not of works, he says in chapter 3. He speaks about Abraham and he tells us that the whole Old Testament, as Abraham exemplifies, was leading to justification by faith.

In order that, as chapter 4, verse 16 says, the promise might rest on grace and be granted to all Abraham's offspring, not only the adherents of the law, that is the Jews, but also the one who shares the faith of Abraham.

[20 : 48] Abraham is the father of us all, says Paul, not just the Jews. And he's just saying the same thing here in verse 4. The emphasis is on the us. Look at it. He's saying that all of us, Jews or Gentiles, all of us who believe, all are justified by faith in Christ Jesus.

All those, and indeed only those, into whose hearts God has poured his Holy Spirit to bring about the obedience of faith.

That's what the law promised and demanded. These are those in whom the law's deepest requirement is fulfilled.

Those who are called by the Spirit's application of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ to belong to Jesus Christ, as chapter 1 puts it, to be called to the obedience of faith.

God's holy and righteous and good conduct is written on their hearts. They're circumcised in heart by the Spirit. That's how he spoke about it in Romans 2. They walk no longer according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

[22 : 02] And their lives, whatever their background, whether it's Jewish or whether it's pagan, their lives have turned around absolutely and completely. Previously, they belonged to sin, they belonged to another, but now, as chapter 7 puts it so beautifully, they belonged to another.

They belonged to the risen Lord Jesus Christ in order that they may bear fruit for God. Chapter 7, verse 4 and chapter 8, verse 4 are parallel verses. We're saved in order that we may bear fruit for God.

We're saved in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully fulfilled in us. You're not saying that we suddenly become perfect. Of course not. That would contradict everything he said in chapter 7.

But what he does mean is that somebody who has had faith in Christ in whom the Holy Spirit has come into their heart to bring them to life, their life is totally turned around.

It's decisively changed. The directing power in their life is no longer the flesh under the power of sin, but it's the Spirit of God.

[23 : 12] And see, that fact leads us to verses 5 to 11. And these verses also give us great, great assurance. Assurance that comes to us in the contrast of our new life in the Holy Spirit.

However feeble we feel, however faltering, how often we fail, we ourselves do exhibit in our lives the decisive change that God has worked in us by his Holy Spirit.

We know that. As Christians, the whole direction of our lives, the whole goals of our life are in total contrast, aren't they, to the world around about us. They're in total contrast to the lives that we had before we were Christians.

That's true, you know that, don't you? That's why we feel weird a lot of the time as Christians. What are you doing on your holidays this summer? Well, I'm taking annual leave to go and work on a camp full of children to tell them about Jesus.

What? What are you doing with your Christmas bonus this year? Well, actually, I'm pledging it for our church's appeal for Christian missionary work.

[24 : 28] What are you going to do with your career in architecture or law or medicine or whatever it is that you're studying at university? Well, actually, what I'm going to do is go and train to be a gospel minister or a missionary.

Well, you're obviously totally mad, aren't you? Totally mad. You're like the kids who would waste a perfectly good Friday night going to do something at a church youth club.

Hello? Well, the wealthy man who doesn't drive the big fancy cars and the fancy yachts but instead gives and gives and gives and gives again to gospel work.

See, in a hundred thousand ways the whole direction of our lives as Christians is absolutely at odds with the way of the world. We have a totally different mindset.

no longer, verse 5, a mindset of the flesh. That's what the Apostle John calls loving the world, the desires of the flesh and possessions and position, all these things.

[25 : 39] The things of the here and now. No, we have the mindset, says Paul, of the spirit and they're as different as life and death, verse 6. Mind of the flesh is death.

The mindset of the spirit is life and peace. The Apostle John says in 1 John 2 that if anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

And that's what Paul is saying here also in verses 7 and 8. You see, the unregenerate mindset, the mindset of the flesh is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's law.

In fact, it can't. Such people cannot please God, he says. Paul's not saying, by the way, that unless somebody is a Christian, they can't possibly be capable of any good behaviour or moral behaviour. He's not saying that. Sometimes Christians say that sort of thing. That's stupid. That's not true for one thing. It's not biblical. But what he is saying is it's not what you do, it's who you do it for and why that really matters.

[26 : 43] And the natural person, the person in the flesh with that mindset isn't doing it for God. They're doing it for themselves. They don't obey the truth of God in Jesus Christ. And therefore, Paul says, they are self-seekers ultimately, however altruistic they may want to think that they are, whether they're pagan and do it in a pagan way or whether they're religious and do it in a moral, religious way.

It's very stark, isn't it? But Jesus says exactly the same thing. Read Matthew chapter 6. The pagan's frantic prayer that he prays on and on when he's in need.

He's trying to manipulate God. He's trying to get things out of God, things that he wants, possessions. That's the pagan mindset. Things are really desperate, pray to God, you might get something out of him. But Jesus says the religious mindset is often exactly the same, indeed worse. It's very public, it's very pious, but actually what you're trying to do is manipulate humans' opinion so that they think well of you and you can feel self-satisfied and righteous yourself. The true disciple though is in total contrast to that whole mindset.

He prays, bearing his head on his knees, Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, not mine. And that's you, isn't it, if you're a Christian?

[28 : 05] Verse 9, you're not in the flesh, you're in the spirit, it's obvious. He says you can't be a Christian. Notice that very carefully, verse 9. You cannot be a Christian without the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in you.

To believe, to have faith in Christ is to have the Holy Spirit. Anybody ever says to you, well, I know you're a Christian now, but what you really need is the Holy Spirit, what they're telling you is you're not actually a Christian, according to the Bible.

Romans 8, verse 9. But you're not like all of those all around you who are hostile to God. You do. Don't you? Submit to God's law, to his commands on your life. You're like Paul in chapter 7, verse 22. You delight in that. Your mind is set on the things of the Spirit. You want to please God.

That's how you want to live if you're a Christian, isn't it? And indeed, you can please God. We're commanded to do that. When we get to Romans 12, verse 1, we'll see it. We're to give our lives, our bodies, as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God.

[29 : 08] Our minds being transformed more and more in line with his good and perfect and acceptable will. That's how we want to be. Colossians 1, Paul calls us to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

That's what you want. Well, that is the genuine evidence that you really are a child of God, Paul's saying to us.

Even if it's painfully true all too often, what verse 10 says? That your body is dead because of sin. That it's a body of sin and death that you still live in.

That indwelling sin is still within you. Nevertheless, says Paul, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. You're alive to God in Jesus Christ through his Spirit who has been poured into your heart.

You see how encouraging that is? How reassuring that is? The Holy Spirit of life can dwell and he does dwell in your body, the very place where your sinful nature still exists and is present and will do until the day of resurrection.

[30 : 21] So often to our great shame. That's true of every single Christian. You do not need some special additional act of great consecration.

some special blessing or baptism or anything else that will somehow enable the Holy Spirit at last to come into your life properly because sin will have been totally driven out properly.

No! He's there already in your body of sin and death. And nor, friends, nor can you ever expel the Holy Spirit from your heart.

Even if you have sinned so badly that you think to yourself, oh, surely the Holy Spirit couldn't possibly dwell in me anymore after I did such a thing. No! If the Lord Jesus Christ, God Himself, when He came into this world, could be born in the filth of a buyer, then His Holy Spirit can live even in our sinful bodies and make us God's children.

And He will never leave you or forsake you. That's what the Gospel promises. The assurance that you're God's child, that you have a real future with Him comes not from outside, not from anything you can do, not from your performance or your lack of it, but from what's inside.

[31 : 49] The Holy Spirit. If you love the Lord Jesus, you belong to Him. If you trust the Lord Jesus, His Spirit is within you. Four times He tells us that in these verses.

Look at verse 9. The Spirit of God dwells in you. And again, anyone who is His has the Spirit of Christ. Verse 11. The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus dwells within you.

He dwells within you, He says again. And verse 11, notice, what He says is that if He is in you now, then He will certainly without question, never mind your ongoing failures and sin, He will give life also, that is, resurrection life to your mortal bodies.

That is a certain hope of eternal life and glory, even in the mess of your still sinful life. That's the assurance that is yours if you're a Christian believer.

Whether you've been one for 50 years or for 5 minutes. Whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. Whether you can recite the Bible forwards and backwards. Or whether it's all completely new to you. You don't know any of it yet.

[33 : 04] The sacrifice of Christ for us, once and for all in history, made real and effective and life changing by the Spirit of Christ in me.

Once and for all by faith when I came to the Lord Jesus Christ. Look down to verse 14. All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, says Paul.

That is a loaded phrase that Paul is using there. Sons of God. Because to the Jew it was the Israelites and only the Israelites who could possibly ever be called sons of God.

To them, says Paul in chapter 9, belong the adoption, the covenants, the glory. God said that to them under Moses in Deuteronomy 14 verse 1.

You are the sons of the Lord your God. And no doubt some of the Jewish Christians in Rome felt that, well, therefore they had a rather superior claim on calling God Father.

[34 : 02] Maybe some of the Gentile believers felt themselves rather second class, rather inferior. They didn't know as much. Maybe they felt that they were being treated like that by the Jewish Christians.

It's easy for us too to think like that, isn't it, in those kind of ways. For our insecurities to fuel our pride and our desire, therefore, to seek assurance from other things, from gaining position, what we are, or from our performance, things that we do.

We want to hear people say things of us, don't they, that make us feel we're really, really are Christian. Oh, she's a great Christian. Oh, she's such a great evangelist.

Oh, he's wonderful. He's so gifted at this and that. We want to hear those things because they make us feel a bit sure in our insecurity, don't they? We want that, don't we?

Because deep down inside, we know the things other people don't know about us. We know our own hearts, our own sins, our own failings. And it's so hard sometimes to really believe, isn't it, that I could be one of God's true children when I know what I'm like and what I've done.

[35 : 18] It seems to contradict so often the gospel that I know I believe. And we have an enemy, we have an accuser who wants us to think those things.

He wants us to think that we can fall back into condemnation again. Are you really a child of God? Are you really? After you did that? Look last day at verses 12 to 17 then and see the great assurance that comes to us when we recognize that in our own lives we can see and feel the characteristics of the genuine new life in the Spirit.

However fearful, however feeble we may feel, there's great reassurance when we realize that we actually experience in our lives the genuine characteristics of the Spirit-filled life.

Verse 14, all of those, says Paul, led by the Spirit, all and only those are true sons of God. But what does that really look like?

Well, it's not some sort of supercharged spiritual dynamism. Being led by the Spirit is not some kind of hotline to divine guidance that bypasses everything else and rational planning and thought.

[36 : 33] No, no, no, no. Paul tells us here clearly three things that the true sons of God are led to by the Holy Spirit leading them. First, he says in verses 12 to 14 that he leads us into ongoing daily conflict with sin.

He leads us to a fight. He leads us to execute, to put to death sin in the flesh. The true child of God, you see, is no longer in the control of their sinful nature.

But although sin no longer reigns in them, it certainly does remain in them as long as these sinful bodies are ours. And so sinful deeds need to be put to death, mortified, daily, forever.

And the conflict that we saw in chapter 7 has not disappeared in chapter 8, has it? It's intensified, if anything. And it's the mark of every spirit-filled, true child of God that they live their lives day by day, crucifying their sin.

You see, once we were addicts to sin. And we were hopelessly held under the power of that addiction. We were helpless to fight against it. But that power has been broken forever through Christ.

[37 : 50] And we're clean. It's like the methadone addict whose dependency has been broken decisively by assembling something like the Xbox treatment.

a real miraculous cure almost that was pioneered by Christian medical people. We were hearing about that some of us just this week. We're clean.

The power has been broken over us. But you see, the evidence that we're clean is that we're now able to fight. Now we are in conflict with sin. We're no longer passive.

We're no longer helpless. We fight to the death. Not for cleanness, but from cleanness. And fight we must because though we're clean like any addict, we're never cured until these bodies of death are gone.

Because we'll always bear the scars, the memories, the appetites for that old life of addiction. And friends, that means that as Christians, you and I will be on the road to recovery until we leave this world and these bodies.

[38 : 58] But we have a new power in our life. We love being clean. We delight in it. We're new at the very heart of our beings. We're filled with what's been called the expulsive power of a new affection.

The love of God in Christ is indwelling us by his spirit and he helps us in the fight that he leads us into. We're not passive. Paul says somewhere else, we toil, struggling with all his energy that works so powerfully in us to put sin to death.

We're not naive, we know that we have an enemy. We don't ever assume that our old temper problems are a thing of the past just because they haven't been for a while. No, we keep praying and working for patience, for self-control.

We don't think we won't be tempted anymore when we're travelling on business by dirty films and the hotel X-rated channels just because it hasn't happened for a while. No, the first thing we do when we go into that hotel room is disable it.

We don't think, well, I'm a senior member of the church now, I'm getting on, I really have heard the preaching for years and years, I know it all. No, we keep praying for a teachable spirit right till the end.

[40 : 15] And when we cry out, wretched man that I am, it's still so hard, it's still so brutal, I still seem to have to be denying myself every single day, taking up this cross every single day.

And Jesus says to us, yes, remember, that's exactly what I called you to, and that's where my Holy Spirit leads all my true brothers. But be reassured, it's characteristic of being part of my family that that should be the case for you.

Second, the Spirit leads us every day into consciousness of our sonship, verse 16. The Spirit himself, says Paul, and only the Spirit who can give us the awareness, the assurance that God is our Heavenly Father.

He himself, emphatic, bears witness with our spirit that we're children of God. It's an intensive verb. The sense is that only if God's Spirit is deeply, deeply joined with our hearts can we possibly know that God is our Father.

That's absolutely characteristic of the Christian believer, isn't it? We don't tend to call God just God, do we? Often how you tell a Christian, they talk about the Lord, not just God, and above all, they talk about their Father.

[41 : 39] And we can only do that because the Spirit makes us know deep within that we truly are God's sons, that we're His. That means we have two things, says Paul, verse 15. We have access to the Father now, without fear, whatever our situation.

Even when we stumble badly, and we're ashamed, and we're in despair, we cry out, Father. Verse 15. We've received the Spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

Even when you've messed up so badly, friends, even when you think I've messed up so badly, the Holy Spirit must have departed from me. The very fact that at that time you get down on your knees and you cry, Oh, Father, forgive me.

That's the proof that the Holy Spirit hasn't left you. Because it's only through Him that you can cry that cry to your Father. He's leading you back to Him.

To pick you up, to rearm you for the fight, and to lead you back out into that conflict again with sin. He leads us to access with the Father now in verse 17, to full assurance of the future.

[42 : 49] If children, then we're heirs. The best is yet to be. We're heirs of God. The whole of what God has promised to us, but is not yet ours, the new creation, the world to come, and at last, the new bodies of a new humanity in Christ Jesus as co-heirs to reign with Him.

Even our frustration you see in this life that makes us cry out, that we want more, more spiritual power, more holiness, more of the glory of God, more spiritual fruit. That itself is evidence, not that we're a failed Christian, but that we're a true Christian. It's part of the inevitable tension of living as ever the heir, but never yet the one who's reigning. It's like poor Prince Charles. All his life, as one who's born to reign as king, and I wonder if he's ever going to get there. His mother lives as long as his grandmother. Life of tension and frustration in that, but that's because he is a genuine heir. And so with us, and that's so characteristic of the genuine spiritual Christian life. [43 : 59] Finally, don't miss the very last line. The Spirit leads us daily into the crucible of suffering. Fellow heirs with Christ in glory, provided we suffer with Him, in order that we may also be glorified with Him.

the genuine child of God will be led by the Spirit of Christ in the path of the true Son of God, the Lord Jesus, the way of the cross, the way of suffering. I often wonder if it's significant that the only place in the whole of the Gospels where we hear the word Abba, Father, on the lips of the Lord Jesus Christ, is in Mark 14 in the Garden of Gethsemane, when he's praying, Father, let this cup pass from me. The last verse leads to the rest of the chapter that we'll look at next time. But let me just say this, because it's so, so important. Sometimes Christians think, and alas, sometimes Christians are even taught, that if terrible things happen in their lives, dreadful suffering of some kind, perhaps, maybe an illness, maybe a desperate, sore bereavement, maybe an affliction of some other kind, they think, God must be angry with me. God must be punishing me. God must have deserted me, because I haven't enough faith. God doesn't love me anymore, because these things are happening to me. And all he's saying to us here, no, no, no, no.

[45 : 36] It's not that. It can never be that. Indeed, it's the very opposite. These things are first rank signs that God's Spirit is leading your life now, and will go on leading your life to glory.

Like his, these rich wounds in your life that are so painful now, will at last be in beauty, glorified with him.

Remember, we have an enemy. The devil. He no longer reigns, but like our sinful nature, he does remain until the last judgment. And he roars like a lion, says Peter, seeking to devour. And one of his commonest ploys is to try and fire his fiery darts to destroy our assurance of our Christian faith.

But we're clothed, friends, in the glorious armor of the true gospel of God. our new life, liberated from sins and sin and Satan himself.

[46 : 42] It's complete if we have the Spirit of God within us. And we know we do. Because we can see the contrast in our mindset from the mindset of this world.

And we can feel deeply in our experience the impact of these characteristics, these hallmarks of the genuine Spirit of Jesus leading us day by day.

So don't fall back into fear. Remember that great vision of Revelation chapter 12 that Bob preached on not so long ago about the deceiver of this whole world, the accuser of the brethren.

He accuses him night and day before God, being thrown down. God in the flesh has condemned him forever. And God's children, we're told, also have overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony, by the sacrifice of Christ for us and by the Spirit of Christ in us.

It testifies to us and to the evil one that we are and that we always will be children of God and fellow heirs with Christ Jesus.

[48 : 00] For there is no condemnation, none, ever, of any kind, ever, ever again for those who are in Christ Jesus who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord, so often we are weak, we feel helpless. Thank you that we know that your Spirit will never leave us or forsake us, but makes his home, even in the filth of our sinful flesh, to lead us to our true home and glory.

thank you for the great assuring message of your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.