

This Week at the Creek

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Here's the text from the pastor's Sunday message:

A Child of God

Romans 8:1-11

February 3, 2008

The comedian Carl Hurley tells about the time he and his wife went shopping for furniture in his hometown of East Bernsted, Kentucky. They were looking around at all the pretty furniture when one living room suit especially stood out to both of them. As they eyed the furniture more closely, up walked a salesperson.

"Wouldn't you love to take that on home with you?" the salesperson asked. "I don't know," Carl said. "That's sure a nice living room suit. I don't think we could afford something like that." The salesperson got a big smile across his face and winked at Carl, saying, "Listen folks. You can have this living room suit. You just make a small down payment, and you don't have to make another payment for six whole months." That's when Carl's wife spoke up: "Who told you about us?"

Isn't that true of most of us? Don't we tend to think that the way we've lived is the way we'll always be living? Don't we tend to think that our old habits, our old lifestyle, our old way of living is unconquerable? Isn't it true that we tend to believe that our old sinful nature continues to maintain dominion over us? No! No! No!

The apostle Paul put it this way to the church at Corinth: "Anyone united with the Messiah gets a **fresh start**, is created **new**. The old life is gone; a **new life burgeons.**" And to the church at Rome – in this passage – he puts it this way: "We no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death." The message Paul was getting across to all the churches was that

the power of sin over us died with Christ at Calvary. Our old sinful selves – our sinful nature – died once and for all, so we are freed from its power.

No, God doesn't take us out of the world or turn us into robots. Yes, we still may sometimes feel like sinning – and sometimes we will falter. The difference is that before we were slaves to our sinful nature, but now we can choose to live for Christ. Before we were slaves; now we are free! It's the same as hearing the words, "Not guilty; let him go free." Think about that for a second: What would those words mean to you if you were on death row? And the fact is that the whole human race is on death row, and we've been justly condemned for repeatedly breaking God's holy law. Without Jesus we would have no hope at all. But thank God, He has declared us not guilty and has offered us both the freedom from sin's dominion and the power to do His will.

When you read these verses carefully, you'll see that Paul divided people into two categories: those who let themselves be controlled by their sinful nature and those who follow after the Holy Spirit. All of us would be in the first category if Jesus hadn't offered us a way out. But once we've said "yes" to Jesus, we'll want to continue following Him – because His way brings life and peace.

Later on in this chapter Paul used adoption to illustrate the believer's new relationship with God. In the Roman culture of Paul's day, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all rights of a legitimate child in his new family. He became a full heir to his new father's estate. In the same way, when a person becomes a Christian, he or she gains all the **privileges** – as well as all the **responsibilities** – of a child in God's family. And one of these outstanding privileges is being led by the Spirit. We may not always feel as though we belong to God, but the Holy Spirit is our witness. His inward presence reminds us of who we are and of whose we are. His inward presence encourages us with God's love, and so we are no longer cowering and fearful slaves of our sinful natures!

If you've committed yourself to Christ, you are one of the Master's children! You've been adopted into His family! And because you have been, you share in all His great treasures as co-heirs. And no matter what your race or your socioeconomic status or your family heritage or your ethnicity or what side of the river you live on, you are a child of God! No matter what your past, you are a child of God!

Yes, you are a child of God, Paul proclaimed, so now act like it! You have no obligation whatsoever to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you turn away from following that old nature and its evil deeds. You are a child of God, and the children of God are led by the Spirit of God! **Behave** like God's very own **children** – because you really are!

Neil Anderson tells that when he was in the Navy, he and his fellow sailors called the captain of their ship "the Old Man." The Old Man was tough and crusty and nobody liked him. He used to go out drinking with all his chiefs while belittling and harassing his junior officers and making life miserable for

the rest of the men on his ship. He certainly wasn't a good example of a naval officer. So when the Old Man got transferred to another ship, every sailor on the ship rejoiced.

But of course, they also got a new skipper – a new Old Man. The old Old Man no longer had any authority over them; he was gone – completely out of the picture. But the crew had been trained under that Old Man. So how do you think they related to the new Old Man? At first they responded to him just like they'd been conditioned to respond to the old skipper. They tiptoed around the new Old Man expecting him to bite their head off. But as they got to know the new skipper, they realized that the new Old Man wasn't a crusty old tyrant like the old Old Man. He wasn't out to harass his crew; he was actually a good guy, really concerned about the men of his ship. They'd been programmed to react a certain way when they saw a captain's braids. They didn't need to act that way any longer, but it took several months to recondition themselves to the new skipper.

You also once served under a cruel, self-serving skipper: your old sinful self with its sinful nature. The admiral of that fleet is Satan himself, the prince of darkness. But by God's grace you've been transferred into God's kingdom. And now you have a new skipper; you've been adopted into the family of God; you're a new person infused with the divine nature of Jesus Christ, your new admiral. As a child of God, you're no longer under the authority of your old Old Man. He's dead; he's buried; he's gone! So don't keep reacting as if your old skipper were still in control of your behavior. Remember, that relationship with your old skipper, that old sinful self, is gone. Choose to live today in the reality of your new nature in Christ Jesus.

Have you ever worried about whether or not you really are a Christian? A Christian is anyone who has the Spirit of God living in him or her. If you've sincerely trusted Christ for your salvation and acknowledged Him as Lord, then I'm here to tell you that the Holy Spirit lives within you and you are a Christian. Since you believe that Jesus is God's Son and that eternal life comes through Him, you'll begin acting as Christ directs; you'll find help in your daily problems; you'll find help in your praying; you'll be empowered to serve God and empowered to do His will; you'll become part of God's plan to build up His church.

Daily we must consciously choose to center our life on the Lord. Use the Bible to discover God's guidelines – and then follow them. In every perplexing situation, ask yourself: What would Jesus want me to do here? And when the Holy Spirit points out what is right, do it eagerly.

A few years back, the entire lower half of an oak tree – out by our pond – was wrapped with choking vines. Of course the vines started small and thin – nothing much to worry about really. But over time they both grew and tightened their grip into the trunk of the tree. By the time I got to it, this tree was quite literally being taken over; the very life was being squeezed from it. So I used a

handsaw to sever the trunks of those vines – one neat cut across each one. Within days, the leaves of the vines started turning brown. But for a pretty good while, the thick mass of the vines still clung to the trunk of the oak. Nonetheless, each of those vines was dead. And over time – actually a long time – I was finally able to pull away all of the grasping vines from the tree.

How easy it is for sin, which begins so small and seemingly insignificant, to grow on us and around us and into us until it has a strangling grip on our lives. And yet Christ's death on the cross has cut the power of sin. Yes, some of those vines of sin still cling; yes, some of them still have some effect. But sin's power has been severed by Christ, and gradually sin's grip will dry up and be pulled away or maybe even fall away – as long as you allow God to have His way in your life.

For if you let Him, the Lord really will transform your life. I recently ran across this quotation from Ezra Taft Benson, and it's continuing to have a tremendous influence on the way I'm looking at things – and people: "The Lord works from the inside out. The world works from the outside in. The world would take people out of the slums. Christ takes the slums out of people, and then they take themselves out of the slums. The world would mould men by changing their environment. The world would shape human behavior, but Christ can change human nature."

Let us pray: Merciful Lord, for those who've allowed themselves to be controlled by their sinful natures, we pray that You would convict their hearts so that they would come to trust Your Son, Jesus Christ, for their salvation and acknowledge Him as Lord of their lives. And for those who are following after Your Holy Spirit, we pray that You would continue to lead and guide and direct them to do what is right in Your eyes, and that You would enable them to celebrate and rejoice in the privilege of being a child of God. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Sources

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