

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 through his Spirit, who lives in you. ¹² Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of 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 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. (Romans 8:11-19)

How Does the Holy Spirit Change Us?

Are you happy with the person you are? In my youth, I always wished that I was a gifted athlete. I wished that I could outrun the defense on the football field and beat other guys to the hoop in basketball and both hit home runs and pitch in baseball. But God didn’t give me those gifts. Even today, there’s a part of me that wishes he had. Now, maybe you might think that’s just silly because God has given me many other gifts. If my faith were perfect, I would be content with the gifts I have and the person I am, and simply rejoice in God’s goodness to me. But I think that many of you know how much easier it is for us to wish that we had other gifts and talents, to wish that we had more likeable or more disciplined or more spontaneous personalities, to wish that we were someone else.

There is also a spiritual dimension to who we are. Are you as strong in your faith as you would like to be? Are you as generous to the Lord with your time and your offering as you should be? Are you as faithful about hearing the Word, are you as dedicated to showing love and compassion, are you the Christian you would like to be? We all have room to grow. We need to be different and better than we are. And we can’t make that happen on our own. God has to do it in us. That’s what St. Paul is talking about today in Romans chapter 8. **How does the Holy Spirit change us?**

- I. He raises us to a new life.**
- II. He reveals us as the children of God.**

I.

Paul says, **“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 through his Spirit, who lives in you.”** Who raised Jesus from the dead? The Bible most often says that God the Father did. But it also says that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus. It even says that Jesus raised himself. The answer is the Trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit raised Jesus. And that same God works in us. **How does the Holy Spirit change us? He raises us to a new life.**

On Good Friday, Jesus was dead. But early Sunday morning, God did the most important miracle in all of history. He raised Jesus. Now, this wasn't the first time or last time God restored a dead person to life. But it was the most important time because Jesus was the Savior. He was the one who took our place. He died to pay for our sins and shortcomings. I asked before if you were happy with your life of faith. If we truly examine our lives, even we every Sunday church goers have to admit that there is much room for improvement. I've been a pastor for almost fifteen years. God called me to share the gospel with unbelievers and to build up the people of God. You know what I find over and over again? My faith is not all that it should be. I get frustrated and angry and that leads me to be short with my children and my wife. I wrestle with things. I don't have the faith to cheerfully put it in God's hands and go to sleep at night. Sometimes I toss and turn until three or four in the morning. I am often discontent. More even than I used to wish to be a great athlete, today I wish that I could be free from temptation and weakness.

Do you ever feel like that? It shows that your faith, like mine, is imperfect. We don't trust God perfectly. Since we don't trust God perfectly, we don't put him first in our lives 100% of the time. Every time we sin, we put something in God's place, even if it's only a momentary sinful desire. We deserve hell. But Jesus took our place on the cross. He paid for all the sin in our hearts. He paid for all our discontent and for all the failures in our lives of faith. He died and paid and early Easter morning, God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit restored him to life. Jesus rose and we are free. God has wiped away all record of our sin.

It took a mighty act of God to conquer sin and death and bring Jesus back to life. No one else has that power. No doctor can bring a person back from the dead. Once the soul leaves the body, it's over. The only thing left to do is arrange for the funeral. Only God can raise a dead body. He did that for Jesus. The same power that conquered Jesus' physical death has conquered our spiritual death. God reaches into our hearts and gives us new life. That begins when he gives us faith. When the water and the word wash away the sins of a baby, God gives that child faith. When an adult hears who his Savior is and God turns him from sin to belief, that person rises from spiritual death.

When we rose, we began a new life of serving God. That's really what Paul wants to talk about this morning: living a new life. He says, **“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 sons of God.”** Each one of us was born a sinner. All that we did, all that we wanted, was sinful. Even the things that seem good to us are sinful when they come out of a heart that is totally enslaved to sin.

But God changed us when he made us believers. The sinner is still there, but God has added a new creature, a believer. Now there are two forces at war in our hearts.

Each one is trying to gain control. If the sinner in us wins and we live his way, we will die. If you live a life of sin, if you fail to repent – if you fail to confess your sin to God and trust in his mercy and turn from sin, your faith will die. It is possible for us to be so totally caught up in sin that we kill our faith. The more we love what the sinful world around us loves, the more we love what the sinner in our hearts loves, the more we poison our own faith.

But if we put to death the misdeeds of the body, we will live. Turning from sin is guarding our faith. Now, it's not that we earn something. Your life of faith does not balance out the sins of the past. You can't redeem yourself or win God's favor by trying harder. Our new life has to be "by the Spirit" as Paul says. It has to come from faith. But when in faith we change the way we live and kill the sinful things we want to do, then we will live because we're following the Spirit of God. We're fighting against sin because we trust that Jesus died for those sins and we want to show him that we love and appreciate all he has done. When we live our faith, we preserve that faith because we are totally focused on Jesus.

But to do that, we have to die to sin. In the Bible, the basic idea of dying is separation. You die physically when your soul and body separate. You die to sin when you separate yourself from the temptations that attract you most. You die to sin when you turn away from it because that's what Jesus paid for. But dying to sin is hard, because we don't want to turn away. We like the sins we commit. We like living just like all the people we see around us. Why should we have to be different? Why should we drag ourselves out of bed on Sunday morning and come here and listen to this same old speech again? Why should we avoid websites and movies and music that tear our faith down? That's the most entertaining stuff around! Why should we turn the other cheek when people put us down? It feels better to let them know they can't mess with us!

Are we willing to die? Are we willing to snuff out those sinful desires and attitudes? Or do we like what our heart says more than we like what God says? Somewhere deep inside us, there should be a voice of honesty saying that we do like our favorite sins and dying every day to those sinful desires doesn't sound like any fun at all. We're sinners. For that we deserve hell. But that's why Jesus came – to pay for that sin in our hearts that doesn't want to die. God has forgiven us for our weakness. And in that message of forgiveness, we find the Spirit's power. Jesus conquered our sin. Now, the Holy Spirit reaches into our hearts and he gives us a new life. He teaches us to kill the sin within us every single day. He teaches us to live for him. Only his power can make that happen. God's promise is that it does happen in us through the gospel.

II.

God has made us different! That is the miracle of Easter! Now we have hope where before there was only despair. Now we will live where before we could only die and go to hell. Now, God works through the gospel to overcome the sin in our hearts and to lift us up to him. **How does the Holy Spirit change us? He reveals us as God's children.**

Paul says, **"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.'"** Living a new life in Christ is not about fear. We don't change because we're afraid we're gonna get slapped if we don't. We are a part of God's family now. The Christian life is

joy and love in response to love and mercy. I once served a woman in her 80's. Once a week, her daughter would come and clean her house. Now, I didn't know the daughter when she was a teenager. But my guess is that there were times when her mother asked her to wash the dishes or run the vacuum or clean her bedroom and she didn't want to do it. I would guess that there were perhaps a few arguments in which she raised her voice to her mother in teenage rebellion. But later in life, she humbly and faithfully did that work. What changed? She grew. She looked back and appreciated the years of love that her mother had showed her. Now that doesn't mean she enjoyed drudgery. But she did it out of love.

God has made us his children. Our Christian lives are something we want to do out of love for him. Paul says that we are now heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. We aren't slaves who deserve to be punished anymore. God has adopted us and he treats us just like his one and only Son, Jesus. How's that for grace?

Being co-heirs with Christ has an effect on us. Paul says that in this life, we suffer with Jesus in order to share his glory. To be faithful to Jesus here means facing hardship and difficulty. It means a lonely struggle against the sin in our hearts. It means sometimes our hearts break because people we love turn their backs on the Lord. It means the devil does everything in his power to kill our faith and if he can't do that, at the very least he torments us with physical, emotional and spiritual attacks. It means that all the enemies of Christ in this world put us down at every opportunity. But we take it all, we suffer it all, because we understand that suffering here with Christ means that we will also share in his glory. Again, not because we earn his glory but because we trust him enough to suffer here knowing he promises us a better life to come.

Paul says, **“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”** Sometimes things seem really bad when you're going through them. In my ministry, I've served many people who've had knee replacements. During the convalescence, sometimes those people question whether it really was a good idea. It seems so painful. But when the surgery is successful and the knee heals, they find that they have mobility that they hadn't enjoyed for years before the surgery. As time goes on, the pain recedes into the past while the joy at being able to walk easily again continues. In this life, we face pain and sorrow and often it seems unbearable. But when we reach heaven, the glory of being with Christ will be so great that no pain or sorrow of this life will matter any more. We won't care about all the things that are so hard to deal with now will because of our joy over living with Jesus.

That is God's promise for you and for me. That promise is what changes us – it even comforts us when we wish that we were different than we are right now. When Judgment Day comes, God will reveal us to the whole world as his children and our joy will be total. Until that day comes, we wait and we hope and we trust. And we live for Jesus. I will never be the athlete that I've always dreamed of being. But every day that I'm here and every time I hear the gospel, God is working in me, making me more the Christian he wants me to be. He is doing the same for you. Trust in his Gospel. Amen.