



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Responsibility of Grace

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Romans 8:12-17

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¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

(Pastor prays)

Responsibility is one of the foremost planks in the platform of Christian maturity, as it is in normal life. If you have children, the primary way you gauge their growth into adulthood is their acceptance of responsibility. All of us are looking forward to that glorious day when they are finally off the payroll. Responsibility – the taking upon yourself the dealing with issues, the owning of wrongs, and the effort to develop. Responsibility means never shifting the blame, rejecting victimhood and the joyful striving for genuine mental, emotional and physical health.

Responsibility – I've said that several times now because it is an often-overlooked part of what it actually means to be a Christian. Let's go to the text. Up until this point, Paul has spent most of his time telling us of what God has done for us in Jesus. He has told us of the wonderful grace of the Gospel, of how Jesus lived the perfect life in exchange for our sinful lives, His death on the cross taking our punishment and His resurrection which promises us a future.

Now in this section, Paul turns for a moment from what God has done for believers to what is expected of believers. Responsibility – what you are now that you have the Holy Spirit? What

are you now responsible for? What is expected of you? And how do you do it? I'll give you a hint. You won't be doing it alone.

Woven through this entire passage on our responsibility is the promise of the power of the Holy Spirit. Human effort in the process of sanctification is obviously necessary but it is never apart from the activity of the Holy Spirit. This passage is filled with the Holy Spirit. Every verse points us to the power of the Holy Spirit as we seek to take responsibility and grow in Christ.

Great Grace Means Great Responsibility

This passage speaks to who you are in Christ. Let's use that identity to define our responsibility.

We are debtors to grace.

That's right from the text. Take verses 12 and 13 as one sentence and see what Paul means.

¹²So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. ¹³For 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.

Paul says it negatively first. We are debtors – not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh you will die. Let's define our terms. Debtor – it is to be obligated, responsible, owed to. Flesh – it's not just the natural part of us. In a broader sense, it is this present world and all the cultural expectations put on us.

Now, armed with the definitions of those two words, let's paraphrase. As a Christian filled with the Spirit, you have no obligations to all the cultural expectations that are put on you almost every hour of every day. Whether it's money, education, sexuality, gender confusion – don't forget we live in a world that is in absolute rebellion against God. And that world can feel intimidating. That's what bullies do: they intimidate you into doing what they want you to do and the promise here is that you aren't in debt to the world or your sinful desire. In fact, just the opposite is true. Your obligation is to God the Father who saves you through Jesus the Son and does that by filling you with the Holy Spirit.

Verse 13 also says those who are not Christians, not believers, those who live according to the flesh, they die an eternal, truly, God-forsaken death. Now stop there. The point I want to make is: don't let sin or culture trick you or bully you or pressure you. That's a lie. Verse 12 says we

are not in debt to the flesh. But look with me at the alternative. What do you do to fight the good fight of faith? Let's go back to verse 13 and finish out.

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.

But if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. Here is our obligation and our struggle. Here is our life's work. If you want the official name, it's the Doctrine of Mortification. It means to put to death the old sins that keep you from growing in Christ. Here is the obligation and responsibility of every Christian. To put to death, to resist, to flee, to tear out, to cut off, to take the kingdom by violence, to struggle, to discipline your body and make it your slave so that after having preached to others you will not be satisfied. Here is the epic personal struggle that every Christian ought to be in but so few really are. This is you going to drastic lengths to kill the besetting sin that you have, and thank God this is not just an exercise in willpower alone. Verse 13 says by the Spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body. This is a neglected topic in Christianity today. But verse 13 is Paul's explanation of what Jesus taught: If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.

Look, here is your life's work – to put to death the deeds of the body, to put to death every use of our bodies—Our eyes, our ears, our mouths, hands and feet – put to death every use that serves ourselves instead of serving God or serving others. And by the Spirit, we are responsible for this.

But how? How does mortification take place? You don't passively sit back and wait on it to happen to you. On the contrary, we are responsible for putting evil to death. I'd like to make some suggestions here because I feel like so many Christians live in this low-level Christianity and don't enjoy the genuine victory that is yours in Jesus. John Owen famously said, "Kill sin or it will be killing you."

I'd like to make some suggestions for Christians:

Decide this minute that you are going to take the initiative and responsibility and that you are, by God's grace and through His Spirit, tired of shame and losing and living with a low-grade sin fever.

Repudiate everything you know to be wrong. Say it, say it out loud and then learn to hate it.

Get ruthless with sin. Quit all that flirting with sin and getting close to the edge. The Lord's Prayer says, "lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

Develop aspirations. Colossians 3:1-2 says, *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.* Develop healthy, Godly pursuits.

Occupy your thoughts with what is noble. Isn't that what Paul said in Philippians 4:8: *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.* Here is the exercise of self-control in your own mind. And if you are having trouble with your thoughts, it might be because of all the trash we put in through our eyes.

I think that's what Jesus meant in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6:22-23. *"The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, ²³ but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!*

We need to admit sin for what it is. Be offensive to yourself and label your own sin with raw truth. It's offensive to God.

To kill sin:

We need to see the sin for what it is. It's poison to your heart. It's offensive to God and it incurs punishment. Those at the cross are saved; those are not unsaved in Hell.

Imagine the worst-case scenario, the eventual worst end.

Be in real fellowship in a church with active accountability.

Confess all known sin, every day, to God.

Great grace means great responsibility. We are debtors to grace. Kill the deeds of the body.

We are children of grace.

What a great turn and promise this text gives us about being children of God. Let's read verses 14-16 and then come back and quickly list the great benefits.

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

Look at the progression of grace. Verse 15 says we go from slaves to sons to finally, in verse 17, we are heirs. This is what grace does. It not only emancipates the slave; it elevates the slave to being a child of God.

Look at the sign of grace in verse 14. It is being led by the Spirit. The Law of God led us to Christ and now the Spirit of God leads us to Christ. In John 16:13 Jesus said when the Spirit comes, He will lead into all truth. The Spirit always points to Jesus, always agrees with the Bible and always leads to holiness. Look at the strength of grace in verse 15. You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but the Spirit of adoption as sons. Here is strength that comes from your identity as a son or daughter of God. You don't have to heed the voice of the old master; you don't belong to sin and Satan. You have been redeemed, purchased, cleansed, forgiven, justified and legally adopted as an eternal member of God's family in Christ.

Look at the prayer of grace. We cry, "Abba, Father." We call out for help like Peter walking on the water when he's sinking, "Lord, save me!" Even more pointedly, here's the prayer of Jesus on the cross. "Abba, Father." Because of what Christ has done for us on the cross, you can call out to God like Jesus.

Look at the witness of grace. *¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*

Deuteronomy 17:6 says out of the mouth of two-to-three witnesses, a matter is established. Here is the only occurrence of the word "Spirit" in Romans 8 that doesn't speak of the Holy Spirit. Being adopted as sons and daughters of God affects the deepest and innermost parts of our being.

Look at the promise of grace in verse 17. We are heirs of God; fellow heirs with Christ. Christians inherit the blessings of God's kingdom only through and in Christ. And that glorious inheritance is obtained only through suffering. Oneness with Christ means that we must follow Christ's own road to glory and as we share abundantly in Christ suffering, we share abundantly in His comfort too. The way to glory and to God is through the cross of Jesus.

Great grace means great responsibility. We are debtors of grace and we are children of grace. It is the great grace of God in Jesus. Be encouraged if you are a believer in Jesus. Be changed if you are not.

(Pastor prays)