

Secure to strive

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[0 : 00] Good morning, family of God in KEC. Today we continue with our sermon series taken from the book of Romans.

Let's pray. Our Father, we pray Lord that you will just illuminate your word to us this morning. Through the help of your Spirit, help us to understand and help us to accept and to take to heart and to practice your words Lord today.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Community, friends, family.

I think this usually evokes good feelings, warmth, joy, security. But it is all not always so.

In our broken world, even relationships which should be secure are not. Broken promises, discord, fragmented communities, cancel culture, rejection.

[1 : 10] I would think most of us have seen divorce among our friends and relatives. Couples who seem to be on a perpetual cold war.

Together, but not really. Siblings not even talking to one another. Christians divided over doctrine and practices. Communities fragmented by politics.

In my work, I have come across a family rejecting a toddler because she was said to be a bringer of bad luck. A teenager rejecting her parents to the point that she tells her friends she's an orphan.

How secure then is our relationship with God? Sometimes we wonder if we really are Christians.

And this is especially when we acutely feel the presence of sin in our lives. It rattles our certainty. It erodes our sense of security.

[2 : 12] More so when we know that Christians are governed by the Holy Spirit and not by the flesh. And we heard last week that those who do not belong to Christ live according to the flesh.

And manifest its fruits. Deeds that gratify the natural urges of the body and minds. Being self-centred rather than God-centred.

Unloving. Ungodly. Paul in Galatians 5 gives a list of the outworking of the flesh. Which includes sexual immorality, idolatry, hatred, discord, jealousy, rage, envy and drunkenness.

And the list is hardly exhaustive. There are manifestations of underlying sin. And Christians who are said to be in the spirit.

And yet we sometimes find ourselves in the following situations. You are alone online. And that pop-up looks rather iffy.

[3 : 19] And your thumb is reaching to tap it. And you pause. Wait. Is this really what I want to do? Or you head out to meet your friends.

You have worked really hard the whole week. You could really do with some downtime. And you think to yourself, I feel like getting wasted.

I deserve this. It's okay, okay. I know I should not get drunk. But just one night can't hurt, right? You feel excited.

You just heard something juicy about Benny. Ah, there's Gina. Hi, Gina. Come, come. Did you hear about Benny? You didn't, ah.

Ayah, nobody told you, ah. But before you utter your next words, you hesitate. You want to just, you are just bursting to continue.

[4 : 18] But you knew you shouldn't. But you so want to. What gives? Today's passage will help us understand the conflict that is going on.

In verse 12, if you keep your Bibles open, we can follow through together. In verse 12, Paul writes that we have an obligation.

Or more literally, we are debtors. But not debtors to the flesh. We can't be. We are not governed by the flesh anymore. So we owe the flesh nothing.

The flesh has no more claims on us. Not our time. Not our effort. Not our devotion. Or loyalty. And we certainly do not have to live according to it.

We do not have to give in to its dictates or its temptations. We can decide to have nothing to do with it. But the verse also implies that though Christians are no longer governed by the flesh, it is very possible for Christians to give in to the dictates of the flesh, of their own volition, and so grieve the Holy Spirit.

[5 : 38] It is possible to give in to the flesh and live by its sinful ways. You see, even though Christ has delivered us from the power and guilt of sin, at this present age, before the full consummation of God's kingdom, we are not yet removed from the presence of sin.

Sin is still around. It refuses to give you up. It sets itself up as an illegal squatter in your life. It lures you.

It tempts you. It calls you. It calls out to you. It wants you, if it were possible, to go back under the rule of the flesh. But why would you want to do that?

Verse 13 tells us that such a lifestyle surely leads to death. Why, as a Christian, would you crawl back into slavery and condemnation?

So Paul wants you not to give in to the flesh. Instead, because you are in the Spirit, you recognize the flesh for what it is, an enemy.

[6 : 55] You are at war with it. It is a conflict that is inevitable and necessary because it is impossible to be loyal to both the flesh and the Spirit.

And it looks like it is a mortal combat. Either the flesh kills you or you kill its misdeeds. In verse 13, Paul writes that if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Paul expects that the misdeeds of the body will manifest itself in your life. Temptations come at you on a daily basis and therefore the need to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

Now, whose responsibility it is to put to death the misdeeds of the body? Look again at verse 13. What does it say? God says it is your responsibility.

You put to death the misdeeds of the body. You don't wait passively for it to be done for you. Effortless sanctification is a false teaching.

[8 : 11] Why does Paul use such a strong language? Put to death. Kill. The reason is so that we are not under any delusion that the misdeeds of the body are harmless.

We are not to sweep them under the carpet. We are not to find excuses for them saying it's just human to act that way. And we are not to shrug them off.

To put to death is the only appropriate action to take against something that can eventually kill you. It is to recognize how evil sin actually is.

We are to cut it off. Put it down. And Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in hyperbolic language that if your right eye causes you to stumble gorge it out and throw it away.

It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. He is not asking you to literally gorge out your eye but he is asking you to take sins so seriously that you are willing to do whatever is necessary to remove it from your life.

[9 : 28] If temptations come to you through what you see touch handle or visit then you must ruthlessly be not looking not touching not handling and not going.

Avoid the circumstances places situations that would cause your resolve to falter. It could mean refusing to listen to gossip in the first place or installing a good anti-malware or ad blocking or even a web filtering app on your devices or avoiding the company of friends whose idea of a good time would drag you into sin or even using the computer in the family room rather than in the privacy of your room or choosing to spend more time with your Christian friends for mutual encouragement and accountability and so on and don't even think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. However, even though you are personally responsible to put to death sin in your life, it cannot be done on your own energy, strength or power.

Verse 13 tells us that we are able to do it only through the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be dependent on the Spirit to provide the power to battle the flesh.

The Spirit warns us as we face temptation. He reminds us of His Word, of what pleases God, of the Gospel and of our new identity in Christ.

[11 : 09] He motivates us and enables us to resist and say no and He shows us our sin and leads us to repentance. Let's go back to the example I gave this morning.

You are about to tap on that pop-up on your phone that is tempting you to view unsavory images or videos. the Spirit reminds you through your conscience that lust is sin.

Jesus had died for that sin. Why live for something which Christ had come to die? And Christ is now in you. Why drag Him into the mud of your sin?

Wipe that pop-up away. Don't tap on it. The Spirit is ever ready to empower you to do so. The question really is whether you are willing to obey.

Do you really want to grow in holiness? Do you really want to overcome sin? Do you want to be more like Jesus? You have to do the hard work.

[12 : 14] If you are willing to obey, then pray for the Spirit's enabling. Say no and turn from the temptation. But what if you have already messed up and sinned?

And you realize the conviction of the Spirit only after the fact? Pick yourself up. Confess your sin. Grief over it. Trust in Jesus and the good news that you have been forgiven in Him.

When the same temptation strikes again, pray and be more determined to say no. let there be an upward progress in your life. And the assurance to you is that it is possible because the Spirit enables you to.

And you should desire for it because the promise is that by doing so, you will live. And in fact, it is not a fair conflict at all.

You are actually striving from a position of victory. the enemy is already vanquished. You are no longer a slave to sin. The righteous requirements of the law is fully met in you through the sin offering of Jesus our Savior.

[13 : 34] And there's now no condemnation for you. Jesus holds you up and God continues to look upon you with favour. Your position of full acceptance to God does not change.

what you are doing is just mopping up operations in a war that is already won. And God does not even let you do it alone.

His Spirit is with you in the fight. And so if you are willing and dependent on Him, there's no way to lose. There's no place for fear or anxiety or weakness.

And take heart. God is not looking for perfection. He is not looking for sinlessness. That this will be given as a gift when Christ comes again.

For the here and now, signs of the spirit life in you is the presence of spiritual conflict for holiness and a progressive growth in your holiness.

[14 : 40] Do you have signs of life? Are you continually by the spirit putting to death the misdeeds of the flesh as they manifest?

If you are, you can be assured that you belong to Christ. You can continue to be secure in Christ even as you strive to be holy. But notice the opposite is also true.

If you do not belong to Christ, there is no conflict. The spirit is not in you and you have no reason to take sin seriously. In fact, you might not even recognize it.

You will not grieve over it or take actions to avoid it or to remove it. You would happily embrace the misdeeds of the body as good and natural, as nothing to be ashamed of, and in fact, even as something to be proud of.

Even as we say no to the deeds of the flesh, we should turn the conflict around and positively cultivate the fruits of righteousness, the fruit of the spirit pleasing to God.

[15 : 55] And one of the most familiar lists includes the attributes of love, of joy, of peace, of patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control.

You want at the end of your life for people to say of you, no, he is not perfect, far from it, but we see him becoming more kind, gentle, and patient.

He radiates joy and peace, learning to be more faithful and self-controlled, striving to love God and people. We see more of Christ in him and less of the world.

And make no mistake, this also is the work of the spirit, the fruit that he cultivates in our lives as we submit and depend upon him and abide in Christ.

In verse 14, Paul then reveals the icing on the cake, the crowning revelation of this passage. For those who are led by the spirit of God are the children of God, sons and daughters of God.

[17 : 16] If this does not excite you, doesn't catch your breath, I don't know. I, a mortal, a sinner, an insignificant created being, a tiny speck in the universe, what?

A son of God? Oh, what grace! Now, how does this passage identify the children of God?

verse 14 says, for those who are led by the spirit are the children of God. What does it mean to be led by the spirit?

Now, the common understanding would be, the spirit led me to take up dentistry, the spirit led me to marry James, the spirit led me to pray for Aaron.

I have no doubt that the spirit does lead in this way. A charismatic Christian may expect a leading with more signs and wonders. But this passage has none of this in view.

[18:27] The immediate context of verse 14 is verse 13. To be led by the spirit is the spirit leading us to put to death the misdeeds of the body.

It would mean that if your idea of being led by the spirit does not include this aspect, then you should reconsider if you are actually led by the spirit at all.

And conversely, if the only exciting and miraculous thing to happen in your life is to continually put to death the misdeeds of the body, there is no doubt at all that you are being led by the spirit of God and you are a child of God.

But on an even wider context, the leading of the spirit includes the various descriptions of life in the spirit of Romans 8. The spirit leads us to life in Jesus, to believe and trust Jesus, to set us free from the law of sin and death.

He sets our minds on to things of God. He enables us to respond to, to submit to and to please God. And all who respond to the spirit in this way find themselves in a uniquely intimate relationship, one of father and child.

[19:56] Verse 15 tells us that the spirit does not make you a slave, so that you live in fear again. And we know fear in the old life when we were slaves to sin, a fearful awareness that we can never stand in God's presence, being subjected to judgment and condemnation.

Under our old life, we were called children of the devil, children of disobedience, children of wrath. God. But no more.

Instead, by the spirit, we receive the adoption to sonship. In a great act of grace, through the atoning death of Jesus the Son, we are adopted into God's family.

Adoption implies that we are wanted, we are invited, and we are chosen children. Dearly loved and precious.

Legal adoption was not practiced in Israel. The word adoption that Paul uses so carefully is a Roman legal practice. In this system, adoptees were more likely adults than children.

[21:16] They could even be freed slaves. The adoptee is welcomed by the new father, receives the same full legal rights as birth children, including inheritance.

Any prior debts, responsibilities, or commitments from his past are erased. He takes on the identity, rights, and responsibility of his new family.

Similarly, by the spirit of adoption, you are made absolutely and completely a member of God's family, sharer of his privilege and partaker of his family life.

You are granted full rights, receiving his love, his blessing, his favour, his grace, his presence, his protection, his nurturing, and his loving discipline.

Jesus calls you his brother or sister, and he gives you new brothers and sisters to travel the journey of life with. Similar to Roman adoptees, your prior debts, responsibilities, or commitment to your old life has been erased.

[22:34] You are no more indebted to the flesh. It has no rights over you anymore. You don't owe it any commitment, responsibility, or obligation.

You now have new rights and new responsibilities in the family of God. You are to strive to follow the ways and values of your new family, including the responsibility to also love your new brothers and sisters with open-heartedness and tender devotion.

And as his adopted children, the Spirit enables us to cry, Abba, Father. In the Old Testament, Israel as a nation and the kings of Judah were called God's sons.

However, it was rare in the Old Testament for God to be directly addressed as Father. Jesus, however, addressed God as Father or my Father frequently, and he taught his disciples to address God as our Father.

He himself called God Abba. This would have been unprecedented because Abba is very informal. It was a familial way of addressing a dearly beloved Father in the everyday language of Jesus.

[23:58] It would be the equivalent of our Daddy, Papa, Pa, Apai. by the Spirit, we can call God with such an enduring term, Papa.

Our father and child relationship with God as a Christian has no comparison to the past. Through Christ, this relationship has taken on a new, deeper, more intimate dimension.

And the verb here is actually cry. It is an emotional cry. We can imagine little Lucas seeing Pastor Brian returning home after work, crying out in delight, Papa!

Or, but actually it's used here, it's more like a cry of anguish. Little Lucas hurts his finger and immediately runs to Pastor Brian crying, Papa, Papa!

What is pictured in verse 15 is that the Spirit enables us to cry out, Abba Father! In our moments of distress, when we are frightened, when we need our Father to lessen the hurt and to comfort us.

[25 : 16] That cry is evidence of the presence of the Spirit in our lives, because it shows that in our hour of need, it is towards our Heavenly Father that we turn.

God is in verse 16, at all times, the Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. This is a calm internal confidence that God is indeed my Dad and I am His Son.

If you are a Christian, you know what I mean. You just know. You have this inward sense of assurance. God is my Creator, my Judge, my Savior, and you know what?

He is my Father. He is the Father who hears my prayers, my confident and helper, my Father who knows what I need, even before I ask of Him, my Father who loves me no matter what, my Father who sings over me with joy, my Father who knew me even before the creation of the world, to call me to the saving knowledge of His Son.

My Father who will not let me remain in sin, but through His Spirit transform me from glory to glory to conform to the likeness of His Son.

[26 : 47] He disciplines me, molds me, so that I will bear family likeness, to be familiar with new family values and practices that pleases Him.

His fatherly hand works all things together for my good. He will not reject me when I fall, but instead find me, bind my wounds and gently restore me.

I can approach my loving Father boldly without fear. That is my perfect and loving Heavenly Father. And as children, we have a future inheritance.

Verse 17 says, If we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His suffering, in order that we may also share in His glory.

We are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. Heirs of God can mean either we receive our inheritance from God or it can also mean our inheritance is God Himself.

[28 : 02] What a glorious inheritance that will be. God Himself is our portion forever and ever, our all in all. And we look forward to the new Jerusalem, to be in God's presence, forever beholding His beauty and sharing His glory.

But hold on, hold on, at this present age, we share Jesus' suffering as well. Jesus said in Mark 8, that whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. There is no crown without the cross.

Our father and child relationship, unlike fragile human relationships, is permanent. Unlike a spouse, a child or a parent, who even though the closest of human relationships can reject us, God will not reject you.

He will not cancel you. He will not unadopt you. for if you are a disciple of Jesus, your position of justified before God is totally secure, as it depends on what Christ has accomplished and not on how you are doing.

[29 : 36] And you have the spirit of life who guides and strengthens you and enables you to obey. and as we will see in the weeks to come, nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And so, we are secure as children of God because of the security we have in Christ. And we are secure to strive for holiness as we are guided and enabled by the Holy Spirit himself.

Let me end by praying a prayer based on another passage of scripture that sums up all that has been said today. And I'm praying from 1 John 3.

Let's pray. Thank you, Papa. What great love you have lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

And that's what we are. Yes, Lord, what assurance you have given us that we are indeed your children as we cry out to you, Abba, Father.

[30 : 48] What we will be like when Jesus comes again has not yet been revealed. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

So, all of us here who have this hope in him will strive for holiness through the spirit as Jesus himself is absolutely holy.

We thank you and we praise you for all this in Jesus' most precious name. Amen. Amen.