

THE HOLY OBLIGATION OF SONSHIP

The Validation of Unshakable Assurance

Romans Series
PBC 2026

Text: Romans 8:12-17; Galatians 4:1-7

Romans 8:12-17 *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.*

Galatians 4:1-7 *I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.*

Introduction:

Often, the genuineness or value of an object is validated by its cost or by how difficult it is to obtain.

Illustration: Rolex watch purchased at a reputable jeweler for 15,000.00 to 25,000.00 versus a good replica purchased on the streets of NY for 250.00 to 500.00.

Now, this may just be an interesting observation to you, since most of us are not in the market for Rolex watches. But if you received a Rolex as a gift and one day wondered whether it came from a reliable jeweler or a NY street vendor, you would want to know how to spot the difference. At some point, you would want rock-solid assurance that the Rolex you had

been given was real – especially since you did not purchase it yourself and you have only the reliability of the testimony of the person who gave you the watch to base your confidence in its genuineness.

And this is where a good number of us are this morning regarding our justification and the salvation we have been given by God.

How do we know that the prayer we prayed when we were small actually accomplished what we were told it would accomplish? How do we know that the repentance we articulated to God actually resulted in genuine salvation and an effective conversion that will be accepted by Him on the day we stand before Him?

This question is of utmost importance because something far more valuable than a watch is at stake – our eternal destiny and our present hope and confidence rest squarely on our assurance that our salvation is genuine.

And that is the scope and intent of Romans 8! Paul states his conclusion boldly, authoritatively, and categorically in 8:1 – *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”* Great! Got that. But what evidence do I actually have that I am one of the people who are “in Christ Jesus,” since they are the only ones who have escaped God’s condemnation and will be delivered from the wrath of God to come?

- Paul’s first evidence is that such people are experiencing something in their lives – a freedom from the controlling power of sin that once dominated them.
- Paul’s second evidence is this – this new controlling power is coming from the Holy Spirit, who indwells them. And anyone who has the Spirit can be fully confident that they are no longer under condemnation.
- However, the third evidence Paul offers is that people who are no longer under condemnation joyfully and gladly embrace a holy obligation from God.

I. A Holy Obligation (8:12-13)

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.

- In 1:14, we learned that we have a sacred obligation (debtors) to share the gospel with the nations and to preach the same gospel to ourselves as Christians. We are obligated to announce or declare the good news of the gospel to people who don't know Christ and to those who do!
- In 8:12, we learn that we have a second obligation – to live (shape our lives) according to the gospel! We are obligated to display the transforming power of the gospel through a life that is being changed by its power and shaped by its values, responses, and priorities.
 - “Debtors” – to have an obligation, to be indebted, to have to do something out of necessity
 - “To live according to the flesh” – to live our lives in accordance with the desires, objectives, demands, values, and priorities of the flesh.
- We are not obligated or under compulsion to allow the flesh to determine how we live, what we do, and why we do it.
- **Why?** Because if you live according to the flesh (if you are this kind of person), you are about to die (this is your present status – note the present active indicative) . . . you are under a death sentence that could be carried out at any time. In other words, ***you are destined to die*** (condemned), and the execution could occur at any moment.
- Paul is referring here to lost people who are still living under the dominion of the old realm, ruled by sin and under the condemnation of the death sentence – and are waiting for its execution at any moment.

Note: The precarious nature of their condition is being emphasized here.

- ***But that is not at all true for believers*** – we are freed from the bondage of having to live this way and from the constant fear of death. Instead, we have been given the freedom and the capacity to live in a totally different way, in a totally different context – we have been given the freedom and the ability to live according to the Spirit, with the assurance that we will live eternally!

A. *We have the ability and the obligation to put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit* (if by the Spirit you are consistently putting to death – *present active indicative* – the evil deeds/works of the flesh).

- *“Deeds of the body”* – the impulses and desires that come from our flesh and demand fulfillment in our bodies – have aligned our bodies, and we are now eager to experience and act on them!
- *“Put to death”* – these sinful desires and impulses must be constantly repudiated in the most definitive way – mortification (put to death).
- *“by/through the Spirit”* – there is only one force strong enough to overcome the strong desires of the flesh and the pull of the body to participate and enjoy those desires – and that is a power that comes from something external to us – the Spirit!

B. *The Spirit is the “Spirit of life” (8:2)*, and all those in whom He resides have the guarantee of eternal life because the death sentence has been carried out on another, Christ! These people have been granted abundant life now and eternal life to come. For them, earthly death is but the door to more life!

C. *There is a kind of life that leads to death, and there is a kind of death that leads to life!*

- If you consistently, willingly, and joyfully live in ways that do not put to death the sinful deeds of the body, it will lead you to death. In this case, because you are not a genuine believer.

- If, on the other hand, you, by the Spirit, put to death those very same deeds, you will live! Because you have manifested that you indeed possess the Spirit of God!

II. A Stunning Revelation (8:14, 17a)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. . . and if sons (children), then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

Paul goes on to reveal two stunning realities that are true of every one who is led by the Spirit of God:

1. These people are the “sons of God” (8:14)
2. These people are the “heirs of God” (8:17)

So what does it mean to be ***“led by the Spirit of God”***?

- A. Whatever it means, it happens consistently and constantly as a way of life (present tense).***
- B. Whatever it means, someone else is doing it to you (passive voice).***
- C. Whatever it means, when it is true, it is the assurance of our present identity and future inheritance!***

- ***“Led by the Spirit”***– you are consistently allowing the Spirit of God to lead you – to direct you, to bring you to a place or a state, and to enable you to arrive there and to maintain your place there.
- Where is the Spirit of God leading you in this context?
- ***Negatively put, He is leading you to mortify the deeds and desires of your body – those aroused and incited by your flesh.***
- ***Positively implied – He is leading you toward a life of progressive, consistent holiness.***

NOTE: This term led is one Paul used elsewhere to describe people whose lives were being led, shaped, and guided by a powerful compulsion to stray after idols (1 Cor 12:2) or by their sinful desires

(2 Tim 3:6) – but here he is stating that there is another powerful and compelling force guiding them – the Holy Spirit.

- This is important because Paul has already acknowledged that we cannot, on our own, lead our body to reject its desires – our will is no match for the flesh. Our good intentions will easily be overcome by the flesh’s reasoning and schemes – every single time. And at the very moment we desire to do the right things, our flesh will rise up and take us captive (7:21-23).
- So we need a stronger force than our own willpower – even the willpower of our renewed inner man. We need the strength that comes from something or someone external to us – and Paul identifies that person as the Holy Spirit.
- ***And the point he is making is this: Unsaved people never live this way (even if they are outwardly moral).*** So, when you meet a person whose life is habitually marked by putting to death the sinful desires of their flesh and who does so consistently and joyfully – you know something: You know that the Spirit of God dwells in them and is the one helping them live this way! And if you meet someone in whom the Spirit of God resides – then you know something else: you know something about their identity – they are sons of God! And if they are sons of God, then you know even more about them: You know they are heirs of God and joint heirs with His Son!
- ***“Heirs”*** – Paul is referring to someone who will receive every blessing, every gift, every treasure, and every position God has promised to give to those who belong to His household.
- ***“Joint Heirs with Christ”*** – These people receive an additional blessing: they share in the unique blessing God promised to His own Son, the crown prince of the universe. We don’t just get to enjoy being citizens of a marvelous kingdom that belongs to God;

we don't just get to live in the greatest, most glorious city ever built – the city whose builder and maker is God – and enjoy all its rights, privileges, and benefits; we get something even more stunning! We get to be co-rulers over all of this because of our indissoluble union with Christ!

- Back in Romans 5, we learned something important about being united to Christ. We learned that whatever happened to Christ happened to us! This means:
 1. When Christ was crucified, we were put to death with him.
 2. When Christ was raised from the dead, we were raised with him.
 3. BUT here is something new Paul adds here. When Christ was made ruler over the universe and given all authority, power, majesty, honor, and glory – all of that was given to us!
- And you will recognize these people when you meet them in this life by this mark – they have a Spirit dwelling in them that is consistently helping them put to death the sinful desires of the flesh that their body still wants to do and enjoy.

But how do I really know this is actually true of me?

III. A Comforting Affirmation (8:15-17a)

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

A. *The Spirit of Adoption* (term used 5x by Paul in his writings)

- We received a gift from God the Father and Christ the Son when they came and made their abode with us – they sent the Holy Spirit to dwell permanently in us!
- And that Spirit did not come to bring you back under the slavery and bondage you were under when you lived under Moses – as

- Israel had to live in bondage to the elementary (basic training) principles while they waited for Jesus to come. What were those basic principles they were in bondage to? The sacrificial system, observance of days, food laws, etc.
- During this period, they were handed over (bonded over and obligated to) the strict guardianship of the Law (Gal 3:23-26). Under that guardianship, they had to live under the heavy weight of the Law's requirements.
 - But when the Spirit came into our lives, He did not lead us back into this kind of spiritual bondage or obligation to Moses.

B. Paternal Relationship

- Now that you have met Jesus, belong to Him, and are betrothed to Him (7:4), the Spirit He sent to dwell in you brings you into adoption, which completely changes your relationship to God from that of a chosen servant under the Law to that of a beloved Son under Christ. That is why the Spirit leads you (*brings you*) to cry out (*this term means to call out with firm conviction that you feel deeply and intensely*) “Abba!” “Father!”
- This would have been shocking to Paul’s Jewish readers! You could refer to God as Father in a formal, ruler-like sense – but to use this term of intimate familiarity was unthinkable! That is why it was so offensive when Jesus did this in his prayers.
- You used to cry “Master,” “Lord” – and that has not changed. What has changed is the stunning, life-giving, hope-generating, joy-producing realization that the Master and the Lord you have been crying out to for all these years is your Father, who loves you and invites you into an intimate relationship with him.
- “***Abba***” is a term expressing intimacy, warmth, and confident assurance. Kings and leaders were often called “abba” by their people – but it did not mean their subjects felt a comfortable intimacy with them unless they were a physical son or daughter.

In Biblical adoption, you get three things:

1. A new identity – “sons and daughters of God”

- But how do I know that this identity is actually mine?

2. A new intimacy – “Abba; Father”

- The Spirit confirms this externally by freeing us from the Law of Sin and Death.
- The Spirit confirms this experientially as we mortify the sinful deeds of the body.
- The Spirit confirms this relationally by removing our fear of and distance from God by causing us to cry out “Abba!”

3. A new inheritance – “heirs of God” (all that God promised to give) and “joint heirs with Christ” (the unique thing God promised Him).

C. Spirit bears witness

- BUT . . . Pastor Sam – I don’t feel that way. I don’t feel I have this intimate relationship with God. How will I know?
- And that is why Paul states something very important – it is the Spirit who bears witness with your Spirit that all of this is true. He is the one who testifies to us that we are children of God.
- And the way the Spirit bears this witness is through three important ministries He has:
 1. He empowers you to mortify the sinful deeds of your body.
 2. He fights for you and in your place against your flesh.
 3. He pours out the Love of God (God’s love for you) lavishly in your inner man (Rom 5:5).

Here is how it plays out in daily life: a) The empowering ministry of the Spirit, by which we kill the sinful deeds of our body, confirms; b) the presence of the Spirit in our lives – that He truly resides in us – which confirms; c) that we are sons of God; and d) the ongoing work of the Spirit witnesses (*it constantly testifies – present active ind.*) to our fearful, timid, and sometimes insecure spirit that we are in fact children of God.

But why “children” when he has been telling us that we are sons?

D. Present Childhood leads to Full Sonship and future glory

- This is why Paul uses the term “adoption” (*uiothesia*).
- This is not adoption as we know it in our day, where we bring an infant into our family through a legal process that gives them full legal standing in our family.
- Adoption is not how we come into God’s family. We come into God’s family by birth – not by adoption.
- BUT – when we came into God’s family as sons and daughters – there was a period when we were children, not fully in possession of our rights, privileges, and inheritance.

- In other words, we are true sons and daughters by birth but who have not yet come of age or into their full standing and inheritance. *Illustration: Children of a king who are still in their minority do not yet have the right to use and enjoy what is truly theirs by birth and standing.*
- In many cultures, when a son comes of age, there is a formal ceremony that recognizes he is no longer a child under authority, waiting to be appointed to His position and to exercise his rightful authority, and that he is authorized to exercise and enjoy all the rights and benefits that are his by birth. That ceremony was called “uiothesia,” which the biblical translators have rendered “adoption” here and in Galatians 4:1-7.

So, when will this happen for us? When we receive our full sonship initiated at the time we receive our glorified bodies!

IV. A Surprising Confirmation (8:17b)

provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

A. Assurance of Future Glory

- Currently, we are children – with certain rights, privileges, and benefits that are ours because we have been born into God’s family (heirs of God and all that He has promised to His children)

and betrothed to His Son (co-heirs with Jesus and all the additional things God has promised to Him) – ***but we have not yet arrived at the time of our full adoption.***

- We have been given a down payment on our inheritance – the Spirit who leads us, enables us, fights for us, assures us, and blesses us now – but there is a day coming when we will stand before God and receive our full inheritance – and that day will come when we receive the very first part of our full adoption – a fully glorified body, just like the one God gave Jesus at His resurrection!
- This is what Paul means when he says that one day we will be glorified with Him! BUT – there is something else in this text that we must not miss:

B. Necessity of Present Suffering

- If we are truly sons and daughters of God who will receive the very same glory, honor, power, and authority in the coming age that God has promised to His Son, then the proof of that in this life is that God will verify it to us by allowing us to fully experience the same things He allowed His Son to experience in His earthly life before He received His glorified body and before all authority was granted to Him.
- And what Jesus experienced was:
 1. Life in a body that experienced all the effects and weaknesses of the curse;
 2. Immense suffering and relentless opposition;
 3. Unexplained suffering, divine silence, and what felt like divine absence;
 4. Progressively experienced obedience – to parents, to the Law, to lawful authorities, to God – until it led to the unbearably difficult moment when, in obedience to God’s plan, he voluntarily embraced – not just death, but a violent death imposed on him, the death of a despised criminal on the cross.

- And all of this obedience was accomplished not through His deity as God in the flesh – but through His humanity! And what led Him in all of this, what strengthened and enabled this obedience and sustained it in its darkest and most difficult moments, was the Spirit of God!
- And that same Spirit resides in you – and if you know that the Spirit resides in you, then you can be fully confident of something else – you are the son or daughter of God!!
- And the surprising affirmation and sobering confirmation that this is so is that you will experience the same kind of suffering Christ experienced in His life for the duration of your earthly life!

Conclusion:

There is no condemnation – therefore, there is no need for us to live in ongoing spiritual defeat. That is wonderful. However, that is not the only reason we lack assurance. Back to our opening illustration of the Rolex watch – now that we know the watch we have been given is genuine, how do we know that it is telling us the right time?

It is one thing to be confident that we are no longer under God's condemnation; it is another to be confident that there is no separation from God – especially when He seems distant, silent, or even absent in our present circumstances!

The present suffering Paul mentions is often excruciating – painful, prolonged, and often unexplained. If it goes on long enough and is debilitating enough, we grow weary, discouraged, and fearful, wondering about the very real silence and apparent absence of God in our circumstances.

And this is why we need a different kind of assurance – that there will be no separation from God, and thus no need to be discouraged.