

¹¹And 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 because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now 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.

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

Exactly What I Need: A Spirit Transplant

In the name of the God who gives life to the dead. Picture yourself lying in a hospital bed and the doctor’s report hits like a ton of bricks. “You need a transplant.” A few of you don’t have to imagine it, those words were actually spoken to you. It really is quite amazing how far medicine has come, by God’s grace, that kidneys and livers and lungs and even hearts that are worn out and failing can be taken out of a living person and replaced with a good organ from someone else.

But there’s one transplant procedure that no doctor can ever perform, and it’s the most needed procedure on earth. Every single person the whole world over is in desperate need of a lifesaving transplant, but not of a kidney or even a heart. What exactly is it that I need to save my life? I need a ***spirit transplant***, because the one inside of me and inside of you, that we were born with was no good from the start. It was sinful even before birth, even from the first instant we were conceived, Psalm 51 tells us. A little earlier in Romans 8, our chapter today, Paul tells us what kind of shape this failed spirit is in. He refers to it as our mind. **“The mind governed by the flesh is death... it is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.” Romans 8:6,7.**

With those words, the Apostle Paul gives us the devastating news. We need a different mind, a new spirit, one that doesn’t live in the realm of the flesh or according to its desires. Our sinful flesh puts us all on the same terminal list of sinners in desperate need of ***a spirit transplant***.

We all find ourselves on the waiting list, and there’s no skipping in line, or proving that we’re more important than someone else, or bribing our way to the top. Then Paul tells us how we get one. God sent his Son in the likeness of our sinful flesh to be a donor for us all.

1. A Spirit transplant to give us life

It’s a moving thing whenever you hear of a story where a transplant is needed, but there’s no available organ, so someone who is a match, perhaps a parent, steps forward to donate it from their own body. But in those cases, it can only be a piece of an organ, or one they can spare because they have two, it can’t be the heart of a living person. It can’t be a whole life sacrifice. But God sent his Son to sacrifice himself completely in order to give us the life and new spirit we need. Then God raised his Son from the dead by the power of his Holy Spirit, and that same Holy Spirit is the one who is sent by both the Father and the Son to bring the message of Christ into our spirits, our inner being. Through the message, our failing old spirit is taken out and replaced with the Holy Spirit transplanted into us, *1) to give us life!*

Paul says, **“If Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of your sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 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 because of his Spirit who lives in you.”** (Rom. 8:10,11) So if we’ve got the Spirit inside us, who is making the message of Jesus our own, then we have life, and this Spirit-given life comes in two senses: spiritual life now on earth and eternal life forever in heaven.

2. A Spirit transplant to put our flesh to death

Paul goes on to talk about these two kinds of life, first our spiritual life now. God has transplanted his Spirit into us and this is the kind of gift that makes an impact, even a transformation, and it comes with an obligation. Think about it like this. If you had lung cancer that was obviously caused by smoking, or you were in liver failure because of too much alcohol, and someone from your family loved you so much that they stepped forward to donate a lung or part of a liver to you, that gift has to mean something to you, and for you in the new life you get to live. They don’t have to say, “Well, if I give this to you, you better quit,” for you to realize that the sacrifice made to give you life means you cannot just go back to filling that new lung up with smoke, or drinking your new liver to death. The costly sacrifice someone made for transforms you to live a new life and take care of that costly gift. That’s what the Spirit does with the gospel of the costly sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The sacrifice transforms our desires to live a new life.

That’s what Paul means when he says, **“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it.”** (Rom. 8:12). We can’t go back to our old life, and we’re not just talking about drinking and smoking, we can’t go back to giving our flesh the free reign to do what it wants when God has graciously transplanted his Spirit into us. And if we do go back to the flesh, if we take the freedom and the second chances and the new life of the Spirit God has given us, and we kill it again by living in sin, then we grieve the Holy Spirit who was given to us, and we throw away his costly grace. Then Paul warns us as bluntly as he can. **“For if you live according to the flesh, you will die.”** (Rom. 8:13)

That’s a warning we need to hear, so that we don’t go back. Our new spirit needs encouragement to keep on living, and the Holy Spirit God gave us is also the one who gives us that encouragement and power 2) *to put the flesh to death*. **“If by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”**

Does that mean on the back end of things that we earn heaven by how well we repent and stop sinning? No, not anymore than we earn our way into heaven on the front end of things by living better or sinning less. But in the new spiritual life of a believer, the Holy Spirit beats within our new spirit to keep us living and breathing and walking on the path to heaven. With the Spirit in us, we now have a freedom—though it is still imperfect, it is being renewed—the freedom to live by the Spirit and walk in God’s commands, or to go back to living in slavery to sin and death. In that sense, we, by the Spirit’s guiding, can and must make choices that keep us alive.

It’s like when someone receives a transplant, there are medications that they need to take to keep their body from attacking and rejecting the new organ. If the recipient says, “Well, now that I got the transplant, I’m not going to worry about that—too much work, too many pills, I’ll take my chances,” it won’t take long for that new transplant to be rejected by the old flesh and they’ll have nobody to blame but themselves. However, taking those meds carefully and following the prescribed schedule means their body will receive the new organ and continue to live.

So in the process called sanctification, the Holy Spirit prescribes the medication of his word to counteract the flesh and to heal, and he gives his sacraments—Baptism and the Holy Supper, to forgive us, assure us, strengthen us from the inside out, to keep on crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires. And we must keep on taking these holy medications so that we continue to live in the joy of recovery and get to experience a beautiful dance of spiritual life here on earth, where he leads and we follow. **“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.”** (14)

3. A Spirit transplant to assure that we are God’s children.

That's the Holy Spirit's next task inside of us: 3) *to assure us that we are God's dearly loved children.* He teaches us to believe that we can approach God as boldly and confidently as dear children approach their dear father. The Holy Spirit was there when he brought us to faith, whether by the powerful word, or when he gave us a new birth by water and the word in baptism. He is the one who brought about our adoption into the family of God, and so it's **"by him, we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"** (Rom. 8:15)

That word Abba is a special Aramaic version of the word Father. It's an intimate term used by children in the family. I don't know if it was just sheer coincidence, but when my son Teddy was learning his first words, the friendly competition was on for whether it will be "Mama" or Dada," so we spent lots of time mouthing those words, "Mama, Dada," but somewhere pretty close to the beginning he started saying "Abba, abba, abba," and we weren't teaching him Aramaic. Now, I'm not saying he was calling out to God, but it's a name we can call our God by from little on and it's also the very special way Jesus addressed his Father, "Abba." Isn't that cool? The Holy Spirit says you get the same standing in God's eyes that his only-begotten Son Jesus has, and you get to call him by the same name.

That personal relationship between you and God displays itself as part of the Spirit's testimony. When you lay your head on the pillow, and your thoughts turn toward God, "I thank you, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ your Son..." the Spirit is turning you toward your Father. When you're scared or stressed or overwhelmed, or you've sinned, and the eyes of your heart look for the grace and embrace of your Father in heaven, the Holy Spirit is testifying with your spirit, that you are God's child, his dearly loved child who gets to approach him with freedom and confidence.

The implications of being true children don't stop there. **"If we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."** (17) As God's children, he has written us into the will. No probate, no purgatory, just a firm guarantee—the children of God get the inheritance of heaven. The Holy Spirit was transplanted into your spirit. He gives you life, spiritual life now, and the inheritance of eternal life still to come.

4. To help us suffer until we share in his glory

That great declaration leads to one more sanctification thought for us. Heaven is guaranteed for the children of God, but we're not in heaven yet. We still live on earth, which is full of sin and strife, and suffering and death. While we still live here, we must continue living by the Spirit and suffering with Christ. **"We are co-heirs with Christ—if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory."** (17)

Nobody likes to have to suffer, but sometimes suffering can get under our skin and make us doubt our standing. "If I'm God's child, why would he let me suffer through something like this?" Actually, Paul says it's kind of the opposite—children of God, co-heirs with Christ, they suffer just like Christ did. So if you have absolutely no suffering here on earth, that's when maybe you should start to wonder if things are too good to be true. But if you suffer here, remember that you're in good company with Christ Jesus your Savior, who walked to his suffering and death to share his glory with you.

So these bumps and struggles, these infirmities we suffer, as painful as they are now, they will pale in comparison. Paul says finally, **"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."** (18). Then, on that day, it will be so good, we won't remember any of this now. But for now, God gave us his Spirit, 4) *to help us suffer through the "now," until we share in the glory of "then."* Amen!