

Here's the question that Paul is dealing with in Romans 8: who's leading you? Who is in charge of your life, and what does that mean for you? Now, many people are surprised by the question: "Who's in charge of me?" Ask hundred people who's in charge of them, and they'll all tell you: "I am!" I'm in charge of me! You're not the boss of me! No one is! I'm a free man!

"Oh really?" Paul says, "then why can't you do what you want to do? And why do you end up doing things you don't want to do?" Ask those hundred people: "You don't ever mess up? You don't ever think poorly of others? You don't ever say unkind things? You don't ever do things that you know you shouldn't, or fail to do what you think you ought to do?" That's Romans 7, which leads Paul to say: "Wretched man that I am! Who will *deliver* me! Who will set me free?"

You're not the boss, are you? You're actually a slave. A slave to your desires – you can't say no to food, to sex, to laziness, to complaining, to arguing. A slave to your fears – fears about your relationships, fears about the future, fears about whether God really loves you. A slave to others – to their words, to what they think of you, to what they want you to do. You are a slave to your body and what it wants – try going without food for a while, or sleep. What does your body think of that?

You are a slave to your body and what it wants. Of course, this wasn't the way God made you. God made man to be a union of body and spirit, and the spirit guided the body in holiness. When the spirit guides the body in obedience to God, that's freedom.

But you when you saw that the fruit from the tree looked delicious and tasted great, the body took over. Your body's desires teamed up with sin to feed your soul a poisoned apple, and killed him. Sin and your spirit had a battle over who would be in charge of your body, and sin won. Sin took charge. Who's leading you? *Sin*. Why can't you do good and obey God, even when you want to? Because you are a slave to sin. Sin gives you an order, and your body say, "Yes, Master." This is what it means to be dead in sin. Your spirit is unable to lead you.

And here's the worst part: it seemed like freedom at the time, to tell your spirit (and God who gave it): "No, I'm gonna eat this fruit if I want to." But it was a lie, and you ended up a slave. And the thing about being a slave is that it's *scary*. It's *fearful*. Slaves don't have *rights*. Slaves don't have *privileges*. Slaves don't have a place at the table. Slaves don't get to call their master "Father". Which means that they have no one who loves them. No one who provides for them. No one who cares for them. No one who will help them. They have someone who orders them around. Someone who demands things from them. Someone who uses them; someone who *abuses* them if he feels like it, and there is nothing they can do.

Someone who *does not love* you has *complete control* over your life. Are you afraid?

This is what it means to be a slave. This is what it means to have sin for your master. It is absolutely terrifying to be led by the flesh, by sin. And the wages of sin is death. You spend *your whole life* afraid of what sin will demand of you next, and the only thing you have to look forward to, even if you serve sin well and do everything sin asks, is *death*. Are you afraid?

Who's leading you? And what does that mean for you? Your *sinful flesh* is leading you, and you are a *slave*, and you live in *fear*.

But jump back with me to verse 9: “⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.”

That's a long introduction so that when you hear verse 14-17, you are ready not to nod in agreement - “Mmm. Bible stuff. Good.” - but so that you cry out “Abba, Father!”

Because Pentecost means that Christ is in you by His Spirit. Even though your body is dead, the Spirit is life! You are no longer led by your sinful flesh! You are led by the Spirit of God!

And what difference does that make for your life? Because you are led by the Spirit, you are sons of God. You are not slaves to sin, you are sons of God. You have someone who loves you! You have someone who cares for you! You have someone who provides for you, someone who will help you! You can turn to God and cry Abba, Father! This is the right of a son.

Apparently there was a law among the Jews that a slave could not address a free man as “Abba”. Even if you happened to see your real father, your new identity as a slave meant that you had no father, only a master. The Jews had some concept of God as Father, but this was not family term, it was more of a title, like we speak of George Washington being “the father of his country.” It didn't mean that any American could walk into Mount Vernon and sit down for supper, or claim a bedroom!

Even God's chosen people realized that ever since Adam had betrayed his Father, the human race related to God as His servants, His slaves, not sons. Paul highlights this in Galatians 4, where he talks about Israel under the law being no different than a slave. “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, ²but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But 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.”

Before Christ, even God's people related to God like slaves, but when Jesus redeemed us from our slavery to sin, we were adopted as sons, and God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, putting new words into our mouths: “Abba, Father.”

And I'm sorry, but I do need to say that “Abba” does not mean “Daddy” as opposed to “Father.” This passage is not highlighting our emotional intimacy with God, or how close to God we feel. This passage is about our *status*, not our *feelings*.

Now, of course it is true that the Father loves the Son, and so He loves *you* as adopted sons and daughters sharing in the Spirit of His Son. You are loved by God, but the contrast in Romans 8 and Galatians 4 is not that “Father” is formal and distant, and that “Daddy” is sweet and cute and cuddly. The contrast is not between *daddy* and *father*, but between *slavemaster* and *father*. It's not that God used to be cold and distant, but now He's friendly and warm. Jesus didn't change God from grumpy to nice. No, it's better than that: you used to be a slave, and now you are a son! Jesus changed *you*, and set you free from your slavery to sin.

As a result, instead of being fearful of the judgment of God, you can look forward in confident hope to receiving your inheritance as a son of God. Just as surely as Jesus will get *His* inheritance from God, you will receive your inheritance! Can you believe that? Can you imagine any situation where God says to Jesus, “I know I promised you that you would be king and receive the nations as your inheritance, *but...*” If you can't imagine that, then you *may not* imagine that God will ever say to you, “You're no son of mine.” Cannot happen. If Jesus gets His inheritance, you will get yours. You are God's son! Your story *will* end in *joy*, and not in *sadness*; in *glory*, not in *judgment*.

“Provided that...” In the joyful rush of this good news, Paul has seen too many people take the *truth* that they are **sons not slaves**, and combine it with the *error* that **sons don't suffer**. It is true that since you have the Spirit, you can rest assured that you are sons. But many many sons grow bitter and angry because their Father does not remove all suffering from their lives. When they start to suffer, they don't *trust* their Father, they give in to fear. They are afraid that their Father won't care for them. They are afraid that their Father won't protect them and provide for them. They are afraid that no one hears when they cry out. They conclude that they are still slaves of a harsh master, and not the children of a loving Father.

And I want you to listen to me know as your pastor: as I have listened to you, prayed with you, cried with you, and entered in some small way into your suffering, I want you to know that God is speaking these words to you in your suffering. You've been betrayed and abandoned, and you're tempted to fear that your loneliness might never go away. You've committed serious sin, and you're tempted to fear that you've destroyed your life and the lives of those you love. You've suffered massive financial loss, and you're tempted to fear that you will never get it back. You are tempted to fear that your marriage will not survive. You are tempted to fear that you've messed up with your kids, and that now your children hate you or hate God, and that they will never come back. You are tempted to fear that you are enslaved to anger that will break your family apart. You are tempted to fear that you don't really matter to God, and that He isn't listening.

You are *suffering*, and it is hard to believe that you are a beloved child of God. But these are the fears of *slaves*; these are the fears of people who do not have a father. But the Holy Spirit says to your spirit that you have been adopted as sons of God; You *do* have a Father.

Listen to what the Spirit says: who are you heirs with? Who is your elder brother? Christ Jesus, God's beloved Son. And what happened to Jesus? He *suffered*! Why, because the Father hates Him? No, because the Father knows that *suffering* is the path to *glory*! And here is the promise God makes to all of His Sons – if you suffer with Christ, you will be glorified with Him.

And so rejoice that you are led by the Spirit! Rejoice that you are no longer a slave, but a son! Rejoice that your fear of punishment has been replaced by the promise of an inheritance! When you suffer, do not fear! Trust your Father. When it seems like you are being treated like a slave, trust your Father! When you suffer, do not turn *away* from God; turn *towards* Him, and cry out to Him, "Abba, Father!" Your loving Father disciplines you *because He loves you*, and He allows suffering to enter into your life because He knows that suffering is the way to bring many sons to glory. Sons suffer, because suffering is the way to glory.

And so in your suffering, do not be led by your fear. Be led by the Spirit. The Spirit reminds you that even though you are suffering, *you are still a son*, and you *will* receive your promised inheritance. Listen to the voice of the Spirit speaking through the scriptures, reminding your spirit that you are no longer slaves who don't have a father; you are now sons of God, and your Abba hears your every cry.

This is Jesus' gift to you at Pentecost: you are given His Spirit of adoption, so that you might be given a Father, who promises to give you a glorious inheritance in Christ Jesus. So put away your fear,

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*