

[Gauger:] We all know what it means to be obligated. But, as a Christ follower, when was the last time you pondered your obligation to the Holy Spirit, and what that means for you? We’ll talk about it next.

Welcome to the Thursday edition of *PROCLAIM!* with Dr. Michael Easley who serves as President of Chicago’s Moody Bible Institute where some 1500 undergraduate students are working hard to learn what it means to become the next generation of Christ followers serving the church.

Well, Michael we are in a study of Romans, Chapter 8, and we come today to Verses 12 and 13 with a blockbuster truth about the Holy Spirit.

[Easley:] You know, to think about our obligation to God is not to pay back or to do good deeds, but our obligation is to live by His Spirit. It’s a little bit cumbersome theologically, but it is a critical truth to start thinking through that this isn’t just we’re saved and we sort of live life the way we want. We have an obligation to live according to His power.

[Gauger:] As spelled out in Romans 8, Verses 12 and 13. We’ll head there now and, as we begin, Michael leads the congregation of Emmanuel Bible Church in a reading of our text.

[Easley:] Let’s look at the text. I want you to read Verses 12 and 13 with me. It’s a short text this morning. See if we can unpack it; 12 and 13 of Romans 8. “So then, brethren, we are under obligation not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But if by the spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

Some of you may still use the King’s English and it may use the phrase “mortify the deeds of the flesh.” That’s a pretty nice, stylistic way to kill the deeds of the flesh. That’s what this passage is about. First, we need to define the word obligation or debt in your Bible. It is used seven times in the New Testament with three fields of meaning. It can be a debtor, like someone who owes money to someone else. It can be a sinner, someone who’s in debt because of their sin. And, it can also mean a moral obligation of some kind, which is what our text in front of us says.

Now, antiquity in the law, if you committed a crime or an injustice was perpetrated against you, the malefactor owed, same word, he owed compensation to the injured party. So, if you hurt someone, you paid restitution. If you stole, you had to retribute the property and perhaps a penalty or you went to jail. The malefactor was punished because he owed the person he or she injured or wounded. It’s the same sense.

In our text, however, it’s a positive sense. We are no longer under obligation to the flesh, but we have a new obligation according to the Spirit of God. We can see the debtor use of the word. For example, in the Lord’s Prayer, which probably more accurately should be called the “Disciple’s Prayer,” forgive us our debt as we forgive our debtor. It’s the same word. Was he speaking financially? He’s really talking about sin. People who have sinned against us and they’re indebted to us. We need to forgive them because we were forgiven, is what the Lord is teaching the Apostles in the Disciple’s Prayer.

Now, the reason I sort of define this a little narrow, the nuance that we somehow repay God needs to be erased. To think of the word debt means I owe somebody something for something I took from them. I can’t ever repay God. You can’t ever repay God. We can’t make restitution for our sins. In fact, a lot of us were brought up with that kind of theological mindset. I got to do some stuff because I’ve done some bad things. That is really wrong. It’s just dead wrong. I can never pay back God for this incredible thing He’s done for me. I’m not making restitution for my sins. So, I prefer the word obligation.

Paul says we are not under obligation to the flesh any longer because the Holy Spirit indwells you and me, because the Spirit of God, the very person of God inhabits us. I am no longer obliged to the flesh. Now, I think it's probably more so a male trait than a female trait, but often men have this thing about their cars, especially old cars. I drove old beaters for years. I remember just being happy driving an old beater. I didn't mind putting a little oil in it, a little gas. It was sort of a friend. I took care of it. I washed and waxed it. I Armor All'd it. It always looked like a new old car. Cindy, back in the early years of our marriage, was embarrassed by the cars I drove. Didn't bother me at all. They were my friends. I remember one of the pastors here one time bought a second, third, fourth, fifth-hand car, old beater of a car, and he said, "I love the body style of that old Toyota." I thought you're sick. But he loved that old Toyota. He could be content with that old car the rest of his life. I understand what he means. Don't you? Some of us understand that. I mean, it's like a friend. And, to some of us it's just like old cars.

And, finally, you know, the thing really does die. It needs to die. And, so you buy another car and, you know, I always count, so you buy one two or three years old. And so, you go and buy a new car and you feel like you had an obligation to that old car. You ever listen to these Melwood ads on the radio? I mean, the violins playing, you know. You want to give your car away right, you know. And, I love the way they do it. It's like, you know, you're parting with your old friend, but it's going to do some good. It's like oh, I feel better then. Listen, they're just going to sell it and use the money. Don't have any miss-affections there. They're not going to give your car to someone. They want to sell it. But what pulls at us? We are no longer obliged to the flesh. It is an old piece of junk. The hoses are shot, the tires are shot, it's out of alignment, it's wore out, it leaks, it burns oil, it consumes too much gas, it's an -- oh, you are no longer obliged. It did not take you through years of use. It's just a machine. We are no longer under obligation to the flesh because we have been indwelt by the very Spirit of God.

The temptations pull at us. We feel like we owe the flesh favor. We feel like we owe it some things. We don't owe it a thing, Paul says. And, that's what sin is; the implication, the desire, the craving that I'm obliged to the flesh. You're not obligated to the flesh anymore. The phrase "If you live according to the flesh, you must die," in Verse 12 means a little attention. It is not a verse of sanctification; meaning he's not saying if you're a believer and you keep living to the flesh, you're going to die. Scripture does teach that can happen. That's not what Paul is teaching here. Paul is teaching what he taught in Verse 6 of the same chapter; that if your mind is set on flesh, the end result is you must die. You're going to be separated from Christ. He's not teaching a new subject. He's saying here that if a person doesn't trust Christ, and the language is very chilling, you must die, you must die.

Well, let's read the two verses again and go on. Verse 12, "So then, brethren --". I'm sorry, let's do it together here. "So then, brethren, we are under obligation not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For, if you are living according to the flesh, you must die. But, if by the Spirit, you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." We have an obligation not to the flesh. Because of God's great benevolence to us we have an obligation to live according to the Spirit. That's what Paul is teaching us. Our obligation because of what God has done for us is no longer to the flesh; it's now to the Spirit. And, our obligation of living by the Spirit is explained in two phrases; but if by the Spirit. Could not be a more stark contrast. You're either living toward the flesh or you're living by the Spirit. There is no gray zone. It's one or the other, Paul says.

Now, I want to do a little technical grammar work on this little word in English, b-y, a little preposition phrase, and I want to talk a little bit about this in some pretty nuts and bolts terms. And so, if you're -- you know, grammar bores you take a little nap, we'll come back in a minute. This is called, this little phrase by the Spirit, is what's called an instrumental means or a dative of instrumentality. What that means is, if I'm going to live no longer according to the flesh, the way I'm going to live requires

something. Paul with that one little word is saying the Holy Spirit and only the Holy Spirit is the One who is the means by which you're going to live this obligation. Let me say it again. I am no longer obliged to the flesh, I cannot live that way, Paul says. Because of what God has done in His kindness I have to live differently. The only way I'm going to live differently is by His Spirit. The Spirit is the means by which you and I are going to live this different way.

I have appreciated Jack Owen over the years for many things, but probably nothing more than this. He would always tell me, "Michael, you cannot make the flesh better. You cannot make the flesh better." Paul is saying we're not obliged to the flesh, but we're obliged to live according to the Spirit, and it's through the Spirit, it's by Him that empowers us to do it. The Holy Spirit is the means by which you and I will put to death the deeds of the flesh. The Holy Spirit is the One through whom you and I will kill sin. No other way to do it, all right.

Let's look at it a little further here. Putting to death the deeds of our body, or as the King said mortify the deeds of the flesh, are very strong words that Paul uses here. He says, "Kill it." He says, "Execute it." That's how those words are used in that time in Greek. Kill it, murder it, go chop it down. All you can do is cut it down or else -- you're never going to kill it. You will not eradicate it. Maybe a D9 Bulldozer might get a start on it, but you're not going to get rid of it once it gets rooted according to the flesh. It's obliged to live that way. Paul says you got to put to death the deeds of the flesh. You don't do it with a physical machete. You do it through the person, instrumental dative. Who is the One? It is the Holy Spirit through whom we are obliged to put to death the deeds of the flesh. Very graphic, very powerful language to kill sin.

The theological point, Paul is saying here, is if you've trusted Jesus Christ, He has indwelt you with His Holy Spirit. Lived, died, buried, came back from the dead, you trusted Him, you embraced Him, He goes to heaven, He sends His Spirit. The Spirit indwells you. Paul is saying you are no longer obliged to the flesh, but by God's great benevolent kindness He indwelt you with His Holy Spirit. And, the only way you're going to deal with the sin of your life is through Him. The means by which you live according to the Spirit, by the Spirit, is the One who enables you and me to put to death the deeds of the flesh. We are under obligation to God, not to the flesh, because of what He's done for you and for me, and He gave us His Spirit to empower us.

I do not think most Christians ever get this far in their spiritual life. Most of 'em try to deal with sin, they toy with sin, they ignore sin, they coddle sin. They never get to understand the importance of Romans 8:13. Why do you think John Owens spilt this much ink trying to explain it? Because people don't understand how crucial this is to the Christian life. It's not the excess of an over spiritualized, perhaps false view of the Holy Spirit, nor is it an over actualized false view of truth, nor is it a wedding of the two in the sense that Jesus does say Spirit and truth. My contention remains we do not understand the person and work of the Spirit in our lives.

[Gauger:] Dead reckoning, Romans 8, Verses 12 and 13, are our message today on *PROCLAIM!*

And, Michael, I can speak for myself here. I'm still wallowing in this concept. The Holy Spirit is the only means by which I can live differently.

[Easley:] Yeah, it's both confounding, but yet it should be greatly encouraging and give us hope, you know, because most of us fail at self-will and at discipline, and trying to do things better. And, when it comes to these things in the spiritual arena we cannot change them without the Holy Spirit. And, that's why it was so important for Christ to leave, so He could send the Spirit to His followers. And, again, there's a lot of unclear and foggy, and misleading teaching about the Holy Spirit out there. Spend some time in Romans, Chapter 8, if you want to see what God is saying about His Spirit.

[Gauger:] And, if you'd like to hear these messages again, you can hear them online at www.proclaim.mbn.org where you will also find a link that will allow you to order 14 Romans messages, www.proclaim.mbn.org.

See you tomorrow.