

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church

Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 14, 2014

Romans 8:12-17¹

Part I

We live in a time that has been called the “post Christian era.” It is a time in which many have fallen from the faith and turned to false messiahs; a time in which the church has less and less of an influence in culture and other influences are on the rise. Its the era in which we live.

One person described the situation this way, “secular culture has lost all sense of the sacred.” That is, in large part, true. The positive impact of the church has been removed from history books; the church is made a mockery by many in the entertainment industry; and Christian symbols are removed from the public square.

Life in such a culture is trying for you and me, the Christian. It is because in a post Christian era, cultural influences tempt you and me to forsake the faith; to throw in the towel; to join the masses.

Today's text deals with this temptation that each one of us faces; the temptation to forsake the faith for something more appealing. In dealing with it, it shows us that what we have in Christ Jesus is *not worth* forsaking for all the world. The arguments take you back to your baptismal faith. We will take the arguments one by one.

Part II

The first argument is put this way, “we are debtors – *not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*. 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.”

A debtor is someone who owes another. He has to pay up. He does, because someone has a *claim* on him.

It's kind of like the professional football players in the news. They committed domestic crimes. They thought they could get away with it...but video technology is everywhere today...and some of what they did

was caught on tape. Found out they have a *debt* to pay. Society has a *claim* on them.

Our old Adam uses that logic. He believes that he has a claim on *us*. He thinks that *we* are obligated to live a life according to the flesh. He argues that *we* owe it to *ourselves* to be who we are, sinners.

It's like an observation someone made the other day. She told me of two different parents who up and left their families. Both of them said, "It's just too hard." Responsibility is hard. Rights are easy. We live in a culture that says you are entitled to your rights at the expense of responsibility. "I'm done with responsibility. I want my rights. I owe it to myself."

In another conversation a friend talked to me of a former Christian. The former Christian said, "I am a Buddhist, sort of. I figure god will accept me if I live a good life." My friend responded, "Have you read the New Testament and what it says about sin and grace?" The former Christian replied, "As long as I am (true to myself) that is what matters." My friend commented to me, "This is the kind of thinking with which people are flooded. It's the culture in which we live."

These are examples of the post Christian cultural way of thinking; you have to be true to yourself; you owe it to yourself. What God's word says doesn't matter. It's the constant drumbeat of the world; and our old Adam wants to get lost in the drumbeat.

The thing is, the old Adam doesn't deliver as he claims. He doesn't give life, but death. "If you live according to the flesh, you will die." Living according to the flesh is a *death* sentence. It puts you behind hell's *bars* with no parole.

That's where Jesus steps in. It is pictured in Jesus' trial. At that trial a mob was clamoring for his death, though Pilate knew Jesus was innocent. So, Pilate had an idea. Each year he let the people choose someone behind bars to go free. Pilate put before them a choice, then, – Jesus or Barabbas. Barabbas was a criminal. He had committed murder. So, he was incarcerated. He had to pay for his crimes. He *owed* it to society. Barabbas had a *debt* to pay. Jesus didn't.

Pilate thought they would choose Jesus for sure. He thought it was cut and dry. Yet, the mob chose Barabbas. So, Pilate released Barabbas. Jesus took Barabbas' place. Pilate condemned Jesus. Barabbas got his life back. Barabbas is a *picture* of us all. Indebted to the flesh, you and I deserve a life sentence in hell; the death penalty. Yet, Jesus did that time for you and me. He took your and my place. He served time for each one of us. Jesus, not you, was condemned for your sins; and it was hell. You are pardoned; released; given life in Christ!

Alive in Christ Jesus, why would you want to feel indebted to the old Adam; to forsake the faith; end up behind hell's bars? Jesus has flung those bars open for you. You have life, real life, in him.

Part III

Our text builds on this argument. It puts it this way, "For as many of you as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive *the spirit of bondage* again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"

To be in bondage is to be a slave. In New Testament times, slaves were considered property. As property, they could not own property. Not even their families belonged to them. Often torn apart, they didn't have family trees. What's more, the master could do with them as he pleased. The crack of his whip drove them. The barked orders rung in their ears. The beatings put fear into the slaves. They did what their master wanted *whether or not* they want to do it.

That's where you and I end up, *if* we forsake the faith. You and I end up chained by sin, *again*. The law becomes our taskmaster. It cracks the whip, "You better conform or you're gonna get hurt." "It barks out the orders, "You better fall in line or face the consequences."

So, forsaking the faith puts you *back under* the law. Under the law *fear* is the motivator. You do what the law requires *not* because you want to. You do it because you fear the punishment. You do it *against* your will.

Think of it this way, our post Christian culture believes it can break free of God's law. Culture claims, "We live in liberating times! Let go of your inhibitions. You are free to be who you want to be!"

No, you aren't. Forsaking the faith and breaking free of God's law is not so liberating as thought. What promised freedom only puts you under bondage. What tempts with liberation only puts you under a harsh taskmaster. It leaves you like a slave, cut off from God's family. It erases your name from God's family tree. You are left alone; alienated in life and in death.

God hasn't left you alienated and alone, though. He adopted you in Christ Jesus. It's like adoption in the New Testament times. Slaves could be adopted. Adoption took place on the market square. There people assembled, witnesses were present, and a city official presided over the adoption. The adoptee was given the name of his new family. At that time, he was also included in the family's will.

All that happened for you at the baptismal font. The baptismal font stands in the public square of the church. There the waters were poured out on you. By means of water and the word, God testified to *your* adoption. He said, "You are my beloved child. You are because I gave all your sin to my Son. I treated him *as if* he were the slave. Chained to the slave market of the cross, I forsook him. I gave him hell for you. I give you heaven.

"Now, because my Son traded places with you, you are my child. I have signed the adoption papers in my Son's blood; given you my name, Christian; included you in my family tree; bequeathed you an inheritance in heaven.

"As my child, then, you get to bring all your troubles to me; to cast all your cares on my shoulders; to express your fears in my ears. You get to cry out, "Abba, Father!" And I am there for you. I hold you safe in my arms. I protect you from harm and danger.

"After all I have done for you, why would you return to bondage and fear; forsake the faith? I have given you *so much* more."

Part IV

Our text sets forth one final argument. It says it like this, “The Spirit Himself bears witness *with* our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs *with* Christ, if indeed we suffer *with* him, that we may also be glorified (*with* him).”

These words are laced with baptismal terminology. We see that from the use of the word “with.” “With” is repeated four times. It reminds us that in baptism we were buried *with* Jesus; and, raised *with* him.² We are now joint heirs *with* him; will be glorified *with* him; and, yes, suffer *with* him. That's the *reality* of being God's baptized child. God's baptized children suffer with Christ. Its not that your suffering earns you brownie points with God; it doesn't make you anymore worthy; it doesn't atone for your sin. No. It doesn't. Jesus did all that for you. Rather, whatever you suffer as God's child is an identifying mark. It is a mark that you *are* a Christian. Jesus says so. “Because the world hated me, it will hate you also.”³ Just think of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East. You and I shudder to think of how they have been mistreated and brutalized. They have, because they bear the name of Jesus. The suffering you and I experience for the name Jesus is less in your face, but real non-the-less. To be sure, the post Christian era belittles the faith, ostracizes the Christian, and seeks its own vanity. As it does, it intimidates you, the Christian. At times like this you and I wonder. We can feel like we are God's abandoned children. Feeling abandoned, if we look around us, it scares us. If we look within for assurance, we are on shaky ground. For that reason the Spirit testifies *with* your spirit. “You are baptized. You are God's child. Yes, the baptized suffer, and the baptized bear the marks of Jesus...but that identifies you as God's child. As God's child, he has given *you* the kingdom. He gave it to you at the font when he gave you Jesus. He keeps you in Jesus by his word. Jesus is worth far more than all the world can offer! In Jesus, all God has is yours. Amen!

¹References to the text (NKJ) will not be cited in the sermon

²Romans 6.3,4

³John 15.18

