

“Rebranded in the Spirit”

Romans 8:12-17

Second in Series

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“All who are led by the Spirit of God, are God’s children”

- Romans 8:24

Prayer of Preparation

O Lord, as your children we are scattered, but by your Spirit you gather us into your Son Jesus Christ as we hear your Word and so remember that we belong to you. Amen.

Message

I would like to share an experiment here at the beginning. I would like to invite you to think of a commercial “brand,” any “brand” – e.g., Apple, Coca-Cola, FedEx, Izod – it doesn’t matter.

For our purposes this morning, let’s take Apple. What is it about Apple that makes it one of the leading brands, one of the leading companies, in the world?

Is it simply the products it makes? The computers? The Logo? The advertising schemes? The tagline? Or is there something else?

Persons who study brands and companies tell us that when people focus on a brand like Apple they are not simply focusing on a *thing*, which they could touch or hear or hold, but rather on an *aspect of identity*, or an element that helps them sense they are connecting to something larger. Persons who choose Apple are not just choosing a product as much as they are a message, a culture, a personality, an identity.¹

Think of other brands. Locally, here in Indiana, think of companies or brands like Ely Lilly or Cummins. Think of local businesses like Main & Madison, or the Artcraft Theater. What makes them special or standout? Remember: a brand

¹ Brian Lischer, “What Is a Brand?” at www.ignytebrands.com.

is not simply a product. Rather, it has to do with a whole network of factors – e.g., hospitality, reliability, responsibility, identity.

Now think for a minute about the exercises we did through the Season of Lent: think about how we invited you to reflect on what Grace Church is about: what is it about this congregation’s brand, or identity, that sticks out, that “marks” us? Even here, we can consider our logo, our mission statement, our tagline, our architecture, our location.

But more, what is it that compels us to be who we are? Take away the signs out front, take out the labels, takeaway the tagline, and what do we have? What *marks*, or *brands*, us? How do we answer that?

New Testament Focus

In our passage from Romans, we learn how the early Christians understood who they were. As Pastor Jenothy shared last week, we learn about how the Holy Spirit is front and center *to any understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ*. Take away the Holy Spirit, or the third person of the Trinity, and we take away what constitutes a Christian.²

How odd, then, that so many contemporary churches have such a confused outlook on this matter: either ignoring the Holy Spirit altogether (out of fear or shame), or becoming so emotionally absorbed in the Spirit that they forget the call of discipleship (out of denial or ignorance).³

It is a strange thing. It would be like saying we could be Americans without understanding the Constitution.

Foundational to any understanding of our identity as Christians is how the Holy Spirit marks us, or brands us, if you will, as children of God (Romans 8:16).

At heart of this passage in Romans is the way in which the apostle Paul lays out how the Spirit marks us: first as debtors, then as children, and finally as heirs, or co-heirs with Christ (Romans 8:12-17).

² See Pastor Jenothy Irvine, “Life Outside the Tomb,” based on Romans 8:1-11, at www.franklingrace.org.

³ I owe this insight to N.T. Wright on the workings of the Holy Spirit and the way contemporary Christians misunderstand the Spirit.

But before we breakdown what Paul says, let's remember something important about this passage, which is our focus over the next several weeks.

Background Music in Genesis and Exodus

Remember that as a faithful Jew there are two very important themes that stand behind what Paul is saying: the first is the theme of creation from Genesis, and the second is the theme of redemption from Exodus. It is so easy, when reading a complex passage like this, to get bogged down in details, so much so that we fail to keep in mind Paul's overall point.

Remember that in Genesis, when God created this world, God created everything in it and called it good (Genesis 1:3). God created human beings in God's own image (Gen. 1:26), and God placed human beings in a Garden to be stewards of that Garden (Gen. 2:6). Unfortunately, though, through acts of deception and wrongdoing, the creatures God had created become entangled in sin, or, as Jenothy shared last week, they became as those who missed the mark of what God intended, allowing themselves to get caught up in desires and powers and actions which took them away from God (Romans 3:26).

But remember, too, in this passage Paul is also referring to Israel in bondage in Egypt. Remember how God led the people of Israel out of slavery and into the wilderness towards the promised land (Exodus 3:17). God went before the people in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:20-22).⁴

And along the way and at various times in the wilderness, the people wanted to go back to Egypt; in the wilderness, there was rebellion, idolatry, and a host of other follies (Exodus 32).

What an Inheritance!

And yet, God would provide for God's children, both in the wilderness and in the land they would *inherit* (Exodus 16).

Note that word "inherit." There would come a time when God's firstborn, God's own children, would inherit a land flowing with milk and honey

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans – Part One* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004), 146.

(Deuteronomy 11:10-12). That's quite an inheritance, and it's an inheritance, along with the covenant at Sinai, that will *mark* Israel!

Let me ask you a question: have you ever inherited anything? It doesn't have to be money. Land? Personal keepsakes? Family customs, traditions? Bad temper?

Rich Gotshall, our historian, is working on a history of Grace Church, as we move toward celebrating 200 years in Franklin, and it is a history that contains a rich inheritance!

And yet, an inheritance is a complex matter. I know some of the worst conflicts I have witnessed as a pastor are arguments about "who gets to inherit what" in a family. Jesus speaks of this dynamic in his parable on the prodigal son in Luke's Gospel: how do we receive an inheritance (Luke 15)? Because receiving an inheritance says something about who we are and how we are to act.⁵

For example, if we receive an inheritance, how will we exercise responsibility toward what we have been given? Will we bless others with it, or will we squander it? Will we utilize our inheritance to benefit others through a matching grant, or a loan, or a charitable foundation, let's say, or, will we simply keep it to ourselves?⁶

Note that with the apostle Paul, as children adopted into the family of God, we have also received an inheritance, although it's an inheritance we have not earned, but have been given in Christ.

In fact, it's an inheritance that calls forth further sharing, for we don't receive this inheritance alone, only for ourselves, but with Christ, who is our co-heir (Romans 8:17). And because Christ is our co-heir, in both suffering and glory, we find ourselves in debt to the One who loved us and saved us (Romans 8:12).

That's what we have inherited – the very grace that leads us from bondage to life, giving us the Spirit, who brings us into a relationship with God as children of God (Romans 8:2, Romans 8:16).

And Now the Rest of the Story

⁵ N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: Romans – Part One* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2004), 146.

⁶ Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 246.

It's a picture of intimacy, with all the markings of love, of being adopted by the Father in the Spirit and then inheriting the gift of Christ's sacrifice. It's an amazing gift, leaving us in debt, yes, but in debt to God, not to our own selfish devices (Romans 8:12).

That's what life in the Spirit looks like!

But there is a catch, or a reservation, if you will: we receive the glory of this inheritance, of this freedom, only *if* – and it's a big if – only *if* we join with Christ in his suffering; only if we participate in the pain of the cross will we enjoy the blessings of his glory, the very redemption of our bodies (Rom. 8:23). If we think we can receive this inheritance as children of God without struggle with God, we have misunderstood the whole gospel.⁷

At the core of being *rebranded in the Spirit* are the cries of those who are willing to suffer with Jesus (Rom. 8:15).⁸

It is why I can't help but think that those who are serving on the frontlines of this pandemic are not in some way sharing in this kind of witness. And I can't help but think that *being the church* at this time is also about being marked or branded as those who are finding ways of sharing in the sufferings of others, of taking wise risks, and reminding folks that they matter – that they are not rejected or alone.

Such a church will have a distinct brand, to be sure, but it will also be one faithful to the whole gospel, to the gospel which calls us not only to share in the suffering of this present age, but also in the glory of the age to come (Rom. 8:18).

May we see the marks of that church. Amen.

⁷ Fleming Rutledge, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel*, 248.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.