

ROMANS 8:9-17
THE SPIRIT IN US

Why is there so much fuss made of Prince Harry's party in Las Vegas this week? After all, he's not the first young man in his mid-20's to get involved in wild parties, to go to night clubs, and to get involved in the kinds of things that made the headlines on Thursday. The reputation of holidays like Club 18-30 would suggest that there are lots of people who party in just that way and whose photos never make headlines. So why the fuss about Harry? Because of who he is! Because he is third in line to the throne; because he is a member of the royal family; because he has a position of enormous privilege. Because of who he is and the privileged position he inhabits, there are certain expectations made of way in which he should behave. If he were a young man who made his living as a plumber or a joiner and who is having fun with his mates on holiday, no-one would notice and no-one would comment!

Is that an unfair expectation? You have to judge the answer to that for yourself. I'm not passing judgement of any kind on his behaviour, but there is a sense in which privilege brings responsibility. We might well disagree on the boundaries we would draw round that sense of responsibility, where to draw the line. Harry is well aware of his responsibilities; you can tell that from the way he has conducted himself when he is in the public spotlight; maybe he has a different sense of these boundaries from the rest of us! One thing is certainly true – it is much easier to criticise from the outside than it is to live inside that kind of responsibility!

What are the privileges of being a Christian? That's a question you might not have asked very often! Are there any privileges of being a Christian? We are certainly made aware of our responsibilities and that we should behave in certain way and if not... But privileges? We know that faith is hard at times and a struggle; we know that we want to believe, but there are all kinds of things that distract us and draw us away from the faith; we know the way we should live life, we've heard Jesus' teaching and we know that our conscience tells us when we get things wrong. We know life is a bit like a tug-of-war competition, with the Spirit pulling us in one direction and our instincts pulling us in the opposite direction and we give in to human nature more often that we would like to admit. We know all of that, but privilege? Not so much!

Romans 8 tells us that Christians are most the privileged people on the planet! This is not because of anything we have done; it is nothing for us to boast about; we are not born to it; this is the gift of God's grace to us because of Jesus. Last week, we saw that *"there is..." (Romans 8:1)* and we said then that this is the consequence of Jesus' dying and rising again; because Jesus has died and is raised *"there is..." (8:1)* We are free to be ourselves, free from the fear of failure; because God forgives and does not condemn, there really is no need to worry about what other people think; we free to be ourselves and to love God. The next part of Romans 8 is going to take us from that kind of legal status to a family relationship, and so take that sense of privilege to a whole new level. We're going to discover who we really are; who we are because Jesus has died and is raised. There is nothing here to make us proud, boastful, or arrogant; everything here is to make us feel enormously humble that this should be true of us; this is the gift of God's grace to us; we rejoice in His gift, in His grace.

Often in trying to understand the Bible, the little words are key. There is a little word in these verses that is key to understanding what this is all about, but the way in which we understand or translate that little word changes the meaning of these verses altogether.

All the way through, you will find that little word 'if'. Now I don't know about you, but the word 'if' to me suggests something uncertain; 'If' suggests that something might be true, but that equally might not be true. We read: "*You are...*" (Romans 8:9) That has caused untold anxiety to generations of Christians: 'do I have the Spirit? I'm only a Christian if the Spirit lives in me, but I don't know if the Spirit is in me; my bad behaviour would suggest that the Spirit is not in me and I'm not a Christian.' Equally, it has opened the door to a way of thinking that really has no Bible basis that I can see and suggests we need a second blessing in order to receive the Spirit and only after that experience of second blessing do we have the Spirit and so only these are the real Christians. That's not what the New Testament teaches.

That little word 'if' can be replaced by the word 'since' and that changes the whole mood and feel of these words. Replace 'if' with 'since' and see what happens. "*You are...*" (Romans 8:9a-11) 'Since the Spirit lives in you' is no longer an uncertain thing, but a statement of fact; here is truly who and what we are because of Jesus Christ. Jesus declares before He died that He would send His Spirit into the world and the Spirit would live in the hearts of all who believe in Him. That promise was fulfilled at the Day of Pentecost and has been the biggest secret of Church life ever since. God's Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, lives in us, unseen, yet present in us. He will draw us to Jesus; the Spirit creates the desire in us to believe, the desire to pray, the desire to come to worship, the desire to read the Bible, the desire to follow Jesus and be like Him. These are the ways in which the Spirit is at work in us. The Spirit lives in us; there is nothing uncertain about that; that in itself is a huge privilege, that God should come to live in His people.

See what a difference that makes: *Since* the Spirit lives in us, we are under God's control; *since* the Spirit lives in us, our spirits are alive in a new way; *since* the Spirit lives in us we will share in Jesus' resurrection. The final part of that privilege is in verse 14: "*those who...*" (Romans 8:14) That is not a gender reference, as if this is a male-only blessing. In the first Century only sons inherited anything from their fathers; daughters got nothing. This is addressed to every Christian; we have to read the whole thing because there is a logic to it: "*For you...*" (Romans 8:15f) It presses on to get to the end and there are several stops along the way:

- 1) we have received the Spirit; we've already said that the Spirit lives in all of us;
- 2) He is the Spirit of sonship that allows us to call God 'Father', a relationship of love and intimacy rather than fear;
- 3) we are God's children, part of His family, given this most privileged status, to be called not just the people of God, but the children of God;
- 4) we are heirs of God together with Jesus.

Here we are talking the language of privilege. How do we find the words to capture the scale of this privilege? First of all, we are God's children. This is all about status. Jesus is *the* Son, the only-begotten, the Son by nature; we are adopted children but children nonetheless! God has made us His family. There is no greater privilege than that. There is a new series of *Who do you think you are?* started a couple of weeks ago; do you remember Matthew Pinsent's family tree? There was a lot of privilege in it as it went. It took him all the way back to God, if I remember rightly! Someone produced a scroll that took him back to Adam, Eve and God. In a sense that's where the family tree of every Christian goes back to, because we are part of His family, God is our Father. This is a position of great privilege; the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, the One who holds time and eternity in His hands is our Father. It is a position of huge privilege; it is also a position with unparalleled access to God; we can speak to Him, not with the rather stiff and formal language of "Almighty God"; "Dear Lord", but with the wonderfully

intimate family language “Our father”. This is the privilege of the Christian, but this is only the first privilege.

There is a second: Jesus inherits the glory of God. He gave up that glory when He came into the world; now that He is raised and ascended, this glory belongs to Jesus all over again. We will share that glory. Everything that belongs to Jesus by right, by virtue of His royalty, is ours by virtue of God’s grace. That’s exactly what it means to say that we are “co-heirs with Christ”. We know what inheritance means: the heir receives his or her inheritance when someone dies and leaves you their fortune in their will; you don’t get it till that person dies, even though legally it is yours from moment will is signed and witnessed, I suppose. God does not die; we don’t have to wait till God dies to inherit. The inheritance is ours now and there are all kinds of blessings that are ours now because of Jesus; next week, we will see that there is part of that inheritance still to come and while we are people greatly blessed now, there is more, a whole other part to that inheritance, and we shall share Jesus’ glory, be perfect, and live in a whole new world.

There are two consequences of this privilege: first of all, enjoy that sense of privilege. At the Queen’s Jubilee concert, Prince Charles was talking to the audience about the Queen, offering her our congratulations on the Jubilee and he addressed her rather formally as “your Majesty” but then he said “mummy”; that sounded strange perhaps and might have been a better way to do it for a man of his age, but he is one of only four people in the world who could address the Queen in that way! Our privilege is to call God “Father” and it is a privilege that we all enjoy. Since we belong to Christ, since the Spirit lives in us, God is our father and we share Jesus’ glory. We have to learn to enjoy that privilege; it is good for us! We’re not very good at enjoying privileges at times; we still think that the whole thing will come crashing down about us and we will lose it, but this is promise of God for us and God keeps His promises.

Secondly, privilege brings responsibility, to live according to the Spirit; “*If by...*” (*Romans 8:13*) Since the Spirit lives in us, our task is to respond. When the Spirit urges us to pray, to read the bible, to come to Church, to love our neighbour and care for them, to curb some instinct to be selfish, to change a bad habit – when the Spirit works in us in these ways and in other ways too, we should pay attention and do what the Spirit urges us to do. Our behaviour, lifestyle, attitudes, demeanour, relationships - everything about us should reflect the fact that we are children of God. This is the controversy about Harry; some people consider that he has not behaved in a manner befitting his privilege. I’ll leave you to make up your own mind about Harry, but for us, being children of God means we need to behave like it!

In our world, privilege is for the few who are born to it or who claim it because they are rich and powerful. In the gospel, privilege is open to everyone. Since Jesus has died and is raised, since the Spirit lives in us, we are God’s children; we are heirs together with Christ. This is true of Christians in leafy suburban Edinburgh, it is true of Christians in a shack in Cambodia, it is true of Christians in the slums of Mumbai; it is true of Christians living in fear of their lives in Pakistan and China. All of this came home to me forcefully for the first time reading a book called *Knowing God*: there is a chapter on Sons of God and it finishes with this: “I am a child of God. God is my Father; heaven is my home; every day is one day nearer. My saviour is my brother; every Christian is my brother too.” Jim Packer says of this set of words: “Say it over to yourself, first thing in morning, last thing at night, as you wait for the bus, any time your mind is free and ask that you may be enabled to live as one who knows it is all utterly and completely true”!