

Romans 8:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.

Analysis

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh (ara oun, adelphoi, opheiletai esmen ou tē sarki tou kata sarka zēn)—The "therefore" draws ethical implications from theological truth (vv. 1-11). Opheiletai means "debtors," those under obligation. Paul's statement is rhetorically powerful: we are debtors, yes—but not to the flesh. The flesh has no legitimate claim; it brought only condemnation and death (vv. 6-8).

The address adelphoi ("brethren") is warm, affirming shared family identity in Christ. The obligation believers have is to the Spirit (implied contrast), who brought life, righteousness, and resurrection hope (vv. 2, 10-11). This is not legalistic duty but grateful response to grace. The Christian life is living in light of what God has done, not earning what He might do.

Historical Context

Paul's ethics flow from indicatives (what God has done) to imperatives (how we should live). This differs from both legalism (obey to earn favor) and antinomianism (grace requires no obedience). The Reformation principle of "justification by faith alone, but faith is never alone" captures Paul's theology: justification is free; sanctification is the Spirit-enabled fruit of gratitude.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. What "debts" does the flesh claim—what lies does it tell about what we owe it?
2. How does viewing obedience as response to grace rather than requirement for acceptance change motivation?
3. What specific obligations do you have to the Spirit who has given you life and righteousness?

Interlinear Text

Ἄρα	οὖν	ἀδελφοί	ὀφειλέται	ἐσμέν	οὐ	τῇ	σάρκα
Therefore	G3767	brethren	debtors	we are	not	G3588	the flesh
G686		G80	G3781	G2070	G3756		G4561
τοῦ	κατὰ	σάρκα	ζῆν				
G3588	after	the flesh	to live				
	G2596	G4561	G2198				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 116:16 (Parallel theme): O LORD, truly I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds.