

The Presence & Promises of the Holy Spirit Part 3

Romans 8:14-17

"...but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

Introduction: Most parents or kids have a similar story at some point in their upbringing. Dads have a unique ability and appetite to explore the boundaries of safety, pushing the flexibility and malleability of children by flinging them in the air, tossing them over a shoulder, or my personal favorite, launching them in a pool. This not only delights children and fathers, but causes the anticipated reaction from concerned mothers. Kids inherently trust their fathers that the activity happening will not produce harm, but only exhilarating fun, and only on rare occasions is that broken.

But there is another scenario as kids get older or more aware that also takes place. That is when your child develops a real sense of fear, understands that pain is possible, and is paralyzed to jump from whatever ledge or tree they find themselves on. This is when a father reminds the child that he **WILL CATCH THEM**, that there is **security in his grip strength**, and they can jump freely. Do you remember as a child that tension, as part of you **KNOWS** that your dad would catch you, but doubt crept in, leaving you less **assured**? It is only when the **security** of a parents' ability to keep safe and the **assurance** of the child to trust that security will it culminate in action. This, in principle, is the ministry that the **Holy Spirit** has in the life of a believer, bringing the assurance of a secured faith, so that we can bear up inevitable stumbling in our mortification of sin and our suffering for the sake of the gospel.

If Romans 8 stopped at verse 13, the life we lead would be one of grit and determination, but not a lot of peace and rest. We'd seek to mortify our sin by the Spirit, but failure at some level is sure in the fight. When those battles are fought and lost, it typically will allow certain **doubts to creep in**, questions that begin to surface: *am I really a believer? Can I still go to God in prayer and worship? Am I secure?* Most true believers go through **seasons** marked by a *neglect in God's Word, a laxity in prayer, an out-of-habit commitment to fellowship with other believers, or a life marked by disappointment, sorrow, failure, or ongoing pain?* Does God still love me, or did He abandon me? Is He just punishing me?

Can you relate to any of these? The reality is that we are **SECURE in our SALVATION by the work of Christ alone**, knowing that nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8:39), but our **ASSURANCE of that security can wane** based on the above circumstances. God, in His magnanimous love and gentle care knew that about us, and **WANTED** us to live out an assured life in the security of our salvation, so He provided the **Holy Spirit** to bring to remembrance the fact that we are part of God's family, and since we are, we are His sons and daughters, He is our close and intimate Father, and we have a sure future together in Christ.

For anyone struggling knowing if you are a true Christian, our hope is that God through His Spirit will bear witness that you are a child of God and give you full assurance of salvation

ASSURANCE by the LEADING of the Holy Spirit (14)

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

We have already observed that the work of the Spirit in the life of a Christian is often confused and misunderstood, which makes sense since He is not seen but lives in us (which is by definition a bit strange to us). But, the work of the Holy Spirit is not only true of EVERY believer, He is one of the greatest gifts God could have given. *But what does it mean to be **led by the Spirit**? And how does this leading bring assurance?*

In the last weeks in Romans 8 we've seen that the Holy Spirit:

- Is the antithesis of walking, thinking, and living in the flesh (8:4-7) Here there is no middle ground in life: a person is either living his life according to his own rules, thoughts, and desires, or according to the Holy Spirit
- The Holy Spirit **INDWELLS** in EVERY believer, and that is a permanent residence, not a temporary reality that comes and goes with obedience. When the Holy Spirit resides, it is equivalent yet different than **Christ Himself being IN US** (Rom. 8:9). The inverse is also true, that anyone who does NOT HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS NOT A CHILD OF GOD.
- The Holy Spirit is Who helps, directs, and compels us to put our sin to death (Rom. 8:13), since we cannot kill sin on our own.

Now, Paul says that the Holy Spirit leads believers, and this verb is in the *passive form*, which means that His leading is the primary agent in our obedience and that He has ruling authority in our life. It ALSO is important to note that this does NOT mean the Holy Spirit is heavy handed on us or that somehow we are robotic, but still must make **choices and decisions** each day in areas of influence, intake, and areas of obedience. The Holy Spirit can be **quenched** (1 Thess. 5:19), which means His leading can be *extinguished or stopped from burning*. He can be **grieved** (Eph. 4:30), which means He can be saddened when we choose to move away from His guidance. Timothy was challenged not to **neglect** the gift he received from the laying on of hands (1 Tim. 4:14). So the Spirit leads, but we must respond, daily, consistently, to His leading. There are **two main areas that He leads in**:

1. **Illumination** – We've looked at these in part, but it bears repeating by looking at a few key passages:

John 14:25-26 – *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, **he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you**”*

1 Corinthians 2:9-11 -

“But, as it is written,

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—*

¹⁰ these things God has **revealed to us through the Spirit**. For the Spirit searches everything, even the **depths of God**. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also **no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God**.

1 Corinthians 2:14 – *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and **he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.**”*

Putting these things together, it is clear that only those who have the Spirit CAN understand Scripture the way it was intended. Yes, people can read it as literature and comprehend the narrative as story, but without the Spirit, a person both **does not AND cannot** understand the depth of God or the mind of the Spirit. But it also means that **if you have the Spirit**, you CAN comprehend what Scripture says. Of course, there are difficult things (2 Pet. 3:16), and we definitely need the help of the people of the church in learning and discerning Scripture, but we have the God given ability through the Spirit to learn and remember all the things taught by Jesus. It takes work for sure, but only those without the Spirit will try without any yield.

2. **Sanctification** – Not only does the Holy Spirit help us say “yes” to righteousness and “no” to sin, He also provides the means. When we **walk with Him, yielding to His leadership through the Word of God**, He *produces in us the very attributes needed to counter our sinful desires*:

Galatians 5:16-17 *“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. 17 For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do”*

How does the Spirit lead us in this? Not by a mystical voice but by producing fruit in us, like *love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, kindness, self-control, and faithfulness*. (5:22-23). He produces these when we allow Him to lead, and the production confirms that He is. If His is not leading, sin will be evident and ongoing: *sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry, enmity, division, envy, etc.* (5:19-21).

Now, the leading of the Spirit confirms that we **ARE SONS of God**, a concept that infers **permanent, personal, and intimate relationship**. This is what Paul expands on next.

ASSURANCE of ACCESS through the Spirit of Adoption (15)

*For you did not receive the **spirit of slavery** to fall back into fear, but **you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons**, by whom we cry, “**Abba! Father!**”*

Adoption is one of the most beautiful, wonderful, and grace driven concepts in Scripture and gospel. Many here today have experienced the blessing of both **adopting a child into their home and/or BEING adopted into one**. In the US, we *typically* (but not always) adopt a baby or toddler with the hope that we can nurture, care for, and raise that child from the beginning of their life onward. We view that child as our own, giving them a name but also having them take our last name. Every privilege, gift, and blessing that would be for children born *into* a family are also given in full to those joining through adoption.

In Roman culture, the adopted child, especially a son, sometimes had greater privilege and advantage than a naturally born son. A childless couple could adopt *virtuous young men, faithful friends, or servants*. *The goal was to pass on the family name, land, and wealth to young and worthy adult men who would honor the family name.* (Dorani). The union with the former family was severed completely, and authority was transferred to the new father, including paying off former debts or obligations. It was as if the former life never existed.

Now, the reality of adoption in either culture is the fact that a family **chose to have a child join their family completely**, and this is the point of our being adopted into God’s family in Christ through the Holy Spirit. The answer to question 74 of the Westminster Confession defines adoption this way:

***“Adoption is an act of the free grace of God, in and for his only Son Jesus Christ, whereby all those that are justified are received into the number of His children, have His name put on them, the Spirit of His Son given to them, are under His fatherly care and dispensations, admitted to all the liberties and privileges of the sons of God, made heirs of all the promises, and fellow-heirs with Christ in glory.”**¹*

What are the privileges of receiving the adoption as Sons:

Galatians 4:4-6 *“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive **adoption as sons**. 6 And because you are **sons**, **God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts**, crying, **“Abba! Father!”** 7 So you are **no longer a slave, but a son**, and if a **son**, then an heir through God.”*

- **Move from slaves and the fear that comes from slavery to sons –**

There is a true change of STATUS – According to Galatians 4:7, we used to be slaves of our sin and flesh. A slave has no rights, but must do anything and everything a Master wants him to do, but it is NOT done out of love or relationship, but an unchanging status. Slaves can only do according to who they are (Luke 17:10). A slave lives in **fear** because a lack of fulfilling a duty will lead to inevitable punishment. But this is not true of a son. **Luke 15** and the story of the Prodigal Son remind us that God does not treat sons like slaves, but covers their sin with His loving sacrifice. When the rebellious son repented and returned, the Father welcomed **his son** back with open arms and full status, even though the son was willing to live LIKE a servant, much to the chagrin of his older brother.

Think about your own kids. When they fail, frustrate, disobey, or stubbornly go their own way, do we disown them??!! Do we tell our kids they are no longer ours?! No, the status of a son is permanent and secure, which should assure our kids to come to us with any and every problem, fault, or need they ever have.

There is a true change of ACCESS - There is a kind of access that my kids have with me that no other child or young person has. When the girls were small, they knew that on Saturday morning they could jump up on our bed --- which would be wrong and weird with *any* other kids. My children now have access to me at **any time**, and they know I will respond. Though I love other people, my kids are privileged to conversations, knowledge, and access that no one else will. Adoption as sons and daughters change the kind of **fear** that we have for God, and compels us no longer to **run FROM God but to HIM**, just like a kindergartener after their first day of school.

1 John 4:17-18 *“By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have **confidence** for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 **There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.** For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.”*

- **Move from a holy but distant God to an intimate, personal Father** – Finally, in one the most wonderful shifts of relationship, adopted sons and daughters can view the holy, sovereign, and perfect God of the universe as **FATHER**. God presenting Himself as Father was not totally absent in the Old Testament, but it was rare (only about 15x's), and most of those had to do with Israel as a nation or the Davidic line specifically (see. Deut. 32:6; Psalm 103:13; 2 Sam. 7:14; Isa. 63:16) But in Christ, through the Spirit, we can approach God as Father, and even our **Abba**.

¹ Daniel Doriani, *“Reformed Expository Commentary”*, p. 264

The term **Abba** is an informal term for a respectful view of fatherhood. It is less about calling God “papa or daddy” and more about a dependent, tender, and intimate relationship. This was the term that Jesus cried out as He was facing the immense pain and terror of the cross, praying with a term of endearment, ‘*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*’ (Mark 14:36). This was the cry of a son in His most vulnerable moment, knowing that He would be heard and helped by a loving father.

Now, we know that for some, viewing God as father is a difficult task, since your experience with your own father was missing, or difficult, or even abusive. This is the sad, terrible, and true reality for far too many. But if you are in that situation, remember that you have been adopted by the best Father, who loved you so much that He **chose you, sent Jesus to die in your place, gave you the Spirit**, so that you can have a new, open, intimate, trusting, and gracious relationship with Him. Our adoption **secures a relationship with God**, and is the basis of our robust assurance of His love for us.

“God’s family comprises solely of adopted sons and daughters --- there are no natural-born sons or daughters in his divine household”¹

ASSURANCE through the INNER WITNESS of the Holy Spirit (16-17a)

*The Spirit himself **bears witness** with our spirit that **we are children** of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*

We are secure in our adopted relationship with God, but God actually gives us another important way that we can be **assured of our salvation**: the *testimony* of the Holy Spirit in our hearts (Gal. 4:6). **Sinclair Ferguson** said we can make two mistakes about what this means: *expecting a mystical, exporting experience ---- or to expect nothing*. We’ve already seen that Spirit guides, sanctifies, and **produces** in us **fruit that is observable, knowable, and palpable**. It does not mean we will not **feel** the kind of security that is true, but we know that our feelings are often the source of doubts. I appreciated what **John MacArthur** preached about knowing our salvation through the Holy Spirit:

“When believers are compelled by love for God, feel deep hatred for sin, reject the world, long for Christ’s return, love other Christians, experience answered prayer, discern between truth and error, long for and move toward Christlikeness, the work of the Holy Spirit is evidenced and those believers have witness that they truly are children of God.”²

God wants us to be assured of our salvation! He is so committed to us as His children that He secures our salvation now and our inheritance in the future --- allowing us to be **His heirs and fellow-heirs with Christ**. What are some of our benefits of the assurance as heirs (Dorani):

- **Access & Confidence in Prayer** – We have assurance that when call upon the name of our Father, He will listen and answer, since He is always with us and an ever present help in trouble.
- **Discipline of a Loving Father** – He will continue to refine us, putting us through trials and discipline to mature and grow us, as all loving fathers do (Heb. 12:5-10)
- **A Growing family, including built in brothers and sisters** – We are not heirs alone, but are part of a larger, growing, adoptive family and community, called the church.

² John MacArthur, “*Romans Commentary*”, p. 438.

- **An Affectionate and Authoritative marked relationship with our Father** – We have a God who is not a heavy handed Master, but a loving Father who chose, knows, and grows us.

The Holy Spirit was given in part so that we would fully understand our **security in Christ** and live out an **assured faith**. Assurance will allow us to walk with full joy, to continue in our battle with sin, to not allow our doubts to consume, and to live in the hope of the future. This is especially important as we know that we will fail at times in our sin and we will deal with **suffering, pain, and persecution on this earth**.

Do you know that you are a believer today? If you ARE a believer but are not assured, are there things in your life that you need to turn from, change, or start doing? If you are not a believer, today can be the day that you yield your life to Christ in faith. Do not wait, but trust the work of Christ done on your behalf so that you can have life and the Spirit in you.