

## The Spirit of Adoption – Romans 8:14-17

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*<sup>14</sup> For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> 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!” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. – Rom. 8:14-17, ESV*

Have you ever taken one of those silly magazine quizzes or a silly online quiz? It’s amazing how pointless and baseless some of them are. Here are a few examples of real magazine or quizzes:

- How “millennial” are you?
- Are you a “stupid girl”?
- Which Taylor Swift Red Carpet look best represents you?
- How obsessed with social media are you?
- Which Disney Princess are you?

But on a more serious note, the real quiz we all need to take has only one question and two possible answers: Are you a child of God? Yes or No?

What does it mean to be a child of God and how can you be assured that you are one?

Some people believe that we are all children of God. They believe in the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. Now, there is a sense in which God is the father of all. In Acts 17, Paul is speaking to the men of Athens, who are not Christians, and he quotes one of the ancient pagan poets, saying, “We are all his offspring.” But “offspring”- even offspring who are cared for, protected, fed and shown kindness day after day – are not the same as true children of God, adopted sons of God.

To be a child of God is to have access to God as your Father. It is a special privilege, not given to all, as we can tell from verse 14 -

### I. Led by the Spirit of Holiness

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

What does it mean to be “led by the Spirit of God”?

There's a general sense in which God reigns over all things and orders all things according to His will and purposes. Jesus said that not even a little sparrow falls to the ground apart from the will of God. We call this "Providence," but that's not what Paul means in verse 14.

Does Paul mean personal guidance? Many people want this from God – "Just tell me who I'm supposed to marry, what job I'm supposed to take, where I'm supposed to live" – and so on. God does order the lives of His children in a special way, promising to work all things together for our good, as we'll see later in Romans 8:28 in a couple of weeks. But that's not what Paul means in verse 14 either.

Notice that verse 14 starts with that little word "For," which connects us back to v. 13.

Here's the whole thought – *"if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."*

So to be led by the Spirit of God in this sense is to be led by the Spirit as the Spirit of holiness, by Whom we put to death the deeds of the body, our sins. So the first way Paul tells us that we can know that we are children of God is if we are led by the Spirit to hate our sin and put it to death and to love obedience and to grow in it.

Again, I need to clarify that we do not become children of God by growing in holiness, but if we are children of God, we are led by the Spirit into a lifestyle of dying to sin and living to righteousness. To make this point clear and to keep us from falling into a legalistic trap of a performance-based spiritual life, Paul makes the next "For" connection and the next statement-

## II. Freed from Fear by the Spirit of Adoption

*"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!'"*

What is the difference between a spirit of slavery leading to fear and the Spirit of adoption? Well, what's the difference between the obedience a slave gives and the obedience a son gives? What's the difference between the status of a slave and the status of a son?

A slave obeys out of fear of punishment and hope of reward only and not out of love. If a slave is unprofitable and loses his productivity, he may be sold, because his relationship to his master is one of pure economics.

A son should obey his father out of love and respect. He knows his father loves him and wants what is best for him. He obeys because his father loves him and he loves his father. If he disobeys, he doesn't fear not being a son anymore.

Here's one practical implication this has for us: Do we ever do the right thing out of the hope that by so doing we'll get into heaven or out of fear that if we don't do it, we'll go to hell? My sister used to tease me with this threat when we were growing up. If I did something wrong, she would say, "You'll go straight to hell for that one!"

In a sense, she was right: Any sin we commit is just grounds for God to condemn us. How many laws do we have to break before we're guilty and deserving punishment?

But this is not the thinking of a child of God. This is not the Spirit we have received. We have received the Spirit of adoption not the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

There's a little word in the original Greek that means "again" and is left untranslated in the ESV; many other translations do include it, and a more complete translation would be "you did not receive the spirit of slavery leading to fear again." By saying "again," Paul is indicating that this was our relationship to God and His law before Christ.

Apart from Christ, we are working to earn salvation; we are slaves, and we are slaves living in fear because we know we've fallen short. A guilty conscience and an awareness of our own shortcomings is the universal legacy of humanity before God. The more we become aware of God's Law – the 10 Commandments, for example – the more we fear and are held in bondage, knowing that death is coming and that we must face God.

Our culture has a love-hate relationship with death. On the one hand, we have an obsession with violence and death as entertainment, but on the other hand, we don't like to think about or face our own mortality. If we can keep death as something that entertains us in an action movie and not something we ourselves have to face, we can keep the idea of judgment at a distance.

Through Jesus Christ, God sets us free from the slavery leading to fear and gives us the privileged status of being children of God. How? Because Jesus took our imperfection, guilt, shortcomings and the judgment we deserve all on Himself and instead gives us His perfect righteousness, obedience and sonship as a gift. We are adopted by the Spirit because of Jesus.

This is how Paul explains it in Galatians 4:4-7:

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup> to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as*

sons. <sup>6</sup> And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” <sup>7</sup> So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

In both Galatians 4:6 and here in Romans 8:15, the heart of the Spirit of adoption or the Spirit of His Son in our hearts is the cry, “Abba! Father!”

This “Abba!” cry has two levels of significance, one legal and the other very personal.

Legally, in Jewish culture no slave was permitted to call any man “Abba.” Thus, our freedom from the bondage of slavery is found in the right to call God “Abba.”

But the significance is so much deeper and more personal than a legal status. We get to call God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, the Lord God Almighty, “Abba! Father!” Abba was the way young Jewish children would call their Fathers; it’s a term of intimacy and of dependence.

Notice that both Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 say that we cry “Abba! Father!” The Greek word for “cry” here is *krazo*, it’s a guttural verb of intensity. We don’t just say or pray or speak, but we cry. In the middle of the night sometimes, I will be awoken by the desperate cry, “Daddy! Daddy!” and I will go running to the crying child, who is usually scared by a bad dream.

In our moments of crisis or despair – when we’re grieving, confused, tempted hurting, lonely, frustrated – if we have the Spirit of adoption, our hearts will cry, “Father!” to our God and He will hear and answer.

### **III. Assured by the Spirit’s Witness**

*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God*

The Spirit of adoption does more than just enable us to cry out to God as our “Father.” The Spirit also bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

We need assurance in this life that we are children of God. But we don’t need false assurance. We don’t need cheap grace, shallow and empty assurances based on nothing real or lasting.

The Holy Spirit does not offer us presumption – the baseless assumption that we are the children of God. No, the Spirit, as He leads us in holiness and as He enables us to cry, “Abba!

Father!” gives us a deep and abiding assurance, the internal witness from the Spirit agreeing with our spirit.

Whenever we speak about assurance, we need to avoid those traps of presumption and despair. Presumption would encourage us to call ourselves children of God without any real basis for doing so, while despair would never allow us to rest secure in our adoption as children of God.

When I was living in rural South Carolina, I never met a non-Christian in 2 ½ years. Everyone I met was saved, born again and assured that they were going to heaven. Except that I wasn't sure that they all were, not really. I couldn't say they were all led by the Spirit of God.

Now we have to be careful not to judge someone else's salvation, but the Bible does not tell us that intellectually agreeing that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died on the cross for our sins and that He rose again from the dead and even a one-time response to that message of walking down an aisle and praying a prayer is all the same thing as becoming a child of God.

In life, there are two ways to become a child of someone – by being born to that person and by being adopted by that person. Now in life, if you've been born to one person, the only way to become the child of another person is by adoption. But God is not limited in the same way we are. God is able to make us born again – born of the Spirit – and then give us the Spirit of adoption, so that we are God's children both by birth and by adoption- by the new birth **and** by adoption through Christ.

Those who would claim to be adopted by God but give no evidence of a new nature, a new heart, a new disposition toward God – this is not true adoption but presumption. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God by assuring us of God's love for us and of our new nature in Christ.

One evidence of the new disposition, the new nature, is not only love for God but love for one another in the body of Christ. Consider how 1 John 4:13-21 lays this out for us –

*“<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> 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.*

*<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."*

I John 4 unites our confession of faith that Jesus is the Son of God with the gift of a new nature from God, specifically as evidenced by love for one another in the body of Christ.

#### **IV. Made Heirs of God**

*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ*

If we are indeed made new in Christ and are children of God, then the reality is that we are not just children but heirs.

The Bible has much to say about our status as heirs and about our inheritance, and when we consider it all and take it seriously, it is stunning:

In Matthew 25, Jesus tells a parable about the coming final Judgment Day. He says:

*"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"*

So, the inheritance we receive in Christ is a kingdom – the kingdom of God – which was been prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

- Hebrews 1:14 says that we are heirs of salvation
- I Peter 3:7 says that we are heirs of the grace of life
- Titus 3:7 says that we are heirs according to the hope of eternal life
- Hebrews 11:7 says that we are heirs of righteousness, the righteousness that comes by faith
- James 2:5 says that we are heirs of the kingdom which God has promised

And then we get one of those stunning "all things" statements in the Bible, in I Cor. 3:21-23:

“So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,<sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,<sup>23</sup> and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.”

ALL THINGS – that’s the inheritance. The kingdom of God. God Himself. Eternal Life. True and abiding righteousness.

*We are heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ . . .*

## **V. Called to Suffer with Christ**

*. . . provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

And so we come to final test of what it means to be a child of God, to suffer with Christ that we may also be glorified with him. Before we consider this point, let’s just review quickly all of the indications of being a child of God and thus an heir of God given in Romans 8 –

1. You have the Spirit of Christ.
2. Christ is in you.
3. You walk by the Spirit.
4. You set your mind on the things of the Spirit.
5. You desire to submit to God’s law and please God.
6. You are putting to death your sins by the Spirit.
7. You are led by the Spirit in holiness of life.
8. You cry “Abba! Father!” to God.
9. You suffer with Christ.

Many of these are different ways of saying the same thing. None of us does these things perfectly. The call is to real authenticity and not to perfection, which awaits us in glory.

So what does it mean to suffer with Christ?

The Bible tells us that Christ suffered in two main ways:

1. He suffered while tempted. (Heb. 2:18)
2. He suffered at the hands of wicked men, being persecuted unto death.

Jesus’ suffering under temptation is seen in two main places in His life:

1. When Satan tempted Him after He had fasted for 40 days in the desert wilderness of Judea.
2. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when He was sweating drops of blood in intense agony at the coming cross.

As children of God who belong to Christ, we suffer in the same two ways:

1. When we are tempted, we don't want to sin, so we struggle and we suffer. Now, we don't suffer with the same intensity as Christ because we give in so easily and then deal with guilt, which Jesus never did. So Jesus experienced the full weight of the suffering of temptation because He never gave in.
2. We also are rejected by the world and persecuted, sometimes in small ways, but in real ways nonetheless. The Bible makes it clear over and over again that we should expect and rejoice in persecution. Jesus said that no one is greater than his master, and that if He was persecuted, we would be, too. The Apostle Paul said that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. The Apostle Peter said that if we are persecuted for being a Christian, then we should rejoice that we bear that name.

Suffering is hard. Both kinds. But we can be encouraged that as we suffer with Christ, we will be glorified with Him, too! We can also know that, as we suffer with Him, He abides with us through His Holy Spirit, offering us strength, encouragement, hope and peace.

This is part of why Jesus became human.

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. – Hebrews 2:14-18, ESV

### **Application:**

1. Be assured of God's love for you as your Heavenly Father.
2. Cry out to your Abba! Father! In times of distress.

3. Be willing to suffer with Christ in the face of temptation and persecution.
4. Cherish your inheritance in Christ more than the fleeting pleasures and empty riches of this world.
5. If God is not your Father or you're not sure whether He is or not, flee to Jesus for salvation. Cry out to God for mercy through Jesus. Turn from your own attempts to please yourself and justify yourself and find all that you need in Jesus instead.

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

*<sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?*

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reprovved by him.*

*<sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

*<sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons.” – Hebrews 12:1-7, ESV*