

SONS OF GOD
ROMANS 8:14-17

Many children, if not all children, at some point will ask their parents, “Am I adopted?” They want to know their place in the family. They want to know if there is a biological connection between their parents and them. They ask the question out of a sense of insecurity, perhaps thinking something like, “If I am adopted, I am less connected to this family, more likely to be unloved, and more susceptible to mistreatment.”

The wise parent is the one that assures the child — whether they are biological or adopted children — of their security and safety within the family unit.

In something of an ironic twist, the family relationship that tempts a child to insecurity is the very truth that the Spirit of God uses to assure the believer of his safety in the salvation of God. Children believe themselves insecure if they are adopted. But the believer is considered secure *because* of his adoption, according to Romans 8:14-17. It is appropriate that we come to this passage on communion Sunday, remembering the act of Christ that led to our adoption into God’s family.

The theme of this passage is that,

THE SPIRIT USES ADOPTION TO GIVE ASSURANCE TO BELIEVERS.

How does the Spirit provide assurance through the doctrine of adoption? The Spirit acts in three ways to give us assurance through our adoption...

1. **The Spirit Leads Us from SIN to SONSHIP (v. 14)**
2. **The Spirit Transforms Us from FEAR to FELLOWSHIP (v. 15)**
3. **The Spirit Affirms Our Change from CONDEMNATION to CHILDHOOD (vv. 16-17)**
 - ✓ The Child’s POSITION (v. 16)
 - ✓ The Child’s INHERITANCE (v. 17a)
 - ✓ The Child’s SUFFERING (v. 17b)
 - ✓ The Child’s GLORIFICATION (v. 17c)

1. The Spirit Leads Us from SIN to SONSHIP (v. 14)

- For three chapters, Paul has been explaining the implications of our salvation to sanctify us. And in this chapter he has been pointing to the sanctifying work of the Spirit. In vv. 12-13, Paul spoke of the necessity of the believer to mortify the flesh by the power of the Spirit.
- In v. 14, Paul continues that thought when he says **for all who...** He is providing a reason or explanation of what he said in vv. 12-13.
 - ✓ He is connecting this verse to the final clause of v. 13 — **you will live**. Why will believers who are mortifying the flesh live? **For** (because), all those who are being led by the Spirit of God are God's sons (and if they are God's sons, they have the eternal life of God)!
 - ✓ He is speaking about **everyone who** is working at mortification by the Spirit's power. There is no one who is excluded. Paul includes everyone who is working.
- One question in this verse is what Paul means by **being led** — in this passage, what does it mean for the Holy Spirit to lead the believer?
 - ✓ The basic meaning of the word is that one is led morally or spiritually and encouraged to go in a particular direction.
 - ✓ But Paul means something more than that — he also means that the believer is governed or controlled by the Spirit of God. It is similar to being "filled" (Eph. 5:18). The Spirit is directing and leading and controlling the entire life of the believer (e.g., Gal. 5:18ff).
 - ✓ And in this verse it seems that Paul specifically means that the believer is being led by the Spirit to mortify the flesh (v. 13). He says in v. 13 that mortification must be done **by the Spirit** and then in this verse he says that the Spirit is leading us. How does He lead? He leads by empowering mortification of sin.
 - ✓ So there is a helpful balance between this verse and vv. 12-13. In v. 13, the emphasis is placed on the obedience of the believer in mortifying the flesh, and here Paul emphasizes the corresponding reality that the believer only mortifies sin because of the resident power of the Spirit working in and through him. The only way anyone will ever mortify sin is because of the Spirit's work.
 - ✓ One commentator helpfully says, "The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit." [Cranfield]
 - ✓ And notice that this direction is constant — **are being led** — the Spirit doesn't give direction and power once or twice and then stop. He is regularly, constantly, continually controlling us.
- What is the ultimate end of those who are being led by the Spirit of God? **These are sons of God.**

- ✓ In fact, Paul is emphatic about this point — “*these*, they are sons of God.” They *really* are sons of God! It’s as if Paul is anticipating that the readers will be incredulous — “no way!” “Yes,” Paul responds — they really are sons of God.
- ✓ The reference to “sons of God” is somewhat rare in the NT — the phrase only appears 9x, and five of those are references to Jesus. It is used of men only 4x (Mt. 5:9; Rom. 8:14; 9:26; Gal. 3:26).
- ✓ In 9:26, Paul points out the starkness and radical nature of this statement when he notes that not only were we not sons previously, but we weren’t even his people. We had no identification with him in any way. We were not connected to Him, united, with Him, pleasing to Him, or acceptable to Him. In fact, we were helpless and were His enemies (5:6, 10).
- ✓ But now we are not only in the family, but we are made sons, with all the rights and privileges of sonship.
- ✓ And that is a tremendous note of assurance for the believer. How do you know you are in Christ?
 - Do you mortify sin (not perfectly, but regularly and continually do you put off sin)?
 - If you are mortifying sin, then the Spirit is working in you.
 - If the Spirit is working in you, then you are a son of God.
 - CONC: if you are a son of God, you have been saved from the wrath of God and are secure.
 - Friend, take comfort from this — this is your life: “The life which God promises is not a mere not-dying: it is to be a son of God, to live as a son of God, both now and hereafter.” [Cranfield]

2. The Spirit Transforms Us from FEAR to FELLOWSHIP (v. 15)

- We experience assurance when we see the fruit of the Spirit working in us to mortify sin.
- We also experience assurance when we consider what our relationship with God was before we were justified and what it is now.
- Before we were justified —
 - ✓ **We had a spirit of slavery.** This is a somewhat unusual term, but Paul is likely thinking about our enslavement to sin, which he spoke of repeatedly (Rom. 6:6, 18, 22; 7:6; 16:18; Gal. 4:8).
 - ✓ We were **fearful**. That is, we were fearful of God; we not only did not love Him, but we were afraid of Him — and those who were not afraid, should have been (3:18-19; 11:20-21; 13:4).
- After we are justified —
 - ✓ We have the **Spirit of adoption**. Paul doesn’t just mean that we “feel” or have a sense of “adoption,” but he means that the Spirit of God produces and confirms our adoption. He brings us into the family of God as adopted children and then He makes us aware of this new relationship.
 - ✓ What does it mean to be adopted?
 - The idea of adoption was not mentioned by name in the OT, though there were a few examples (Moses was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and Esther by her uncle Mordecai).

- The idea primarily came from secular, Greco-Roman culture.
 - ... The adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family.
 - ... The adopted person was placed under the authority of his new father and became heir to his new father's estate.
 - ... The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out — all debts and obligations were paid and cancelled.
- For the believer who is adopted —
 - ... We owe no allegiance to our old master, sin, but we do to our new Master, God ([Gal. 3:26-4:7](#))
 - ... God has given us the HS as a guarantee that we are freed from sin ([Gal. 4:6-7](#))
 - ... The HS's presence guarantees our reception of every benefit as God's heirs ([Rom. 8:23](#))
- But there is an even greater benefit to divine adoption over human "adoption" —

"To make us thankful, consider, in civil adoption there is some worth and excellence in the person to be adopted; but there was no worth in us, neither beauty, nor parentage, nor virtue; nothing in us to move God to bestow the prerogative of sonship upon us. We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace; begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who has blessed you in making you his sons and daughters." [Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, 240.]

"...no human parent can impart his own distinct nature to an adopted child. Yet that is what God miraculously does to every person whom He has elected and who has trusted in Christ. He makes them sons just like His divine Son. Christians not only have all the Son's riches and blessings but all of the Son's nature." [MacArthur, *Ephesians*, 15.]

- ✓ Because of this new relationship we call out to our Father in joyful dependence — ***we cry out, "Abba, Father."***
 - This ***cry*** is not a reference to the declaration of faith that results in justification; it is the repeated, continual, daily, and hourly cry of the child for its father.
 - And it is a loud cry, filled with deep emotion; it is the call of the believer to God for help.
 - What is obvious also is how the believer petitions God — ***Abba, Father.*** While rare, OT Israelites would occasionally pray to God as Father, but it was not the norm. Jesus then commands the disciples to pray, addressing God as ***our Father*** (Mt. 6:9) — personal!
 - But here it says that we not only call him "Father," but ***Abba*** — "papa" or "daddy." It is a term of intimacy, love, and fellowship. As one writer says, "God is not a distant Ruler in transcendence but One who is intimately close." And Jesus calls the Father "Abba" in the time of His greatest agony (Mk. 14:26). We call on the Father, just as Christ (our brother) did. We are full members of God's family, as Christ is, and have access that comes with being a family member.
 - Notice also that we don't say, "I am the Father's son," but "God is my Father" — it is an upward, God-centered, God-focused, God-exalting declaration. We are contemplating God, not ourselves.

- ✓ Because of this, we can also say that —

There is a kind of reverence which is, in fact, irreverence. There is a way of putting God off at a distance which may look pious, but it is contrary to the will of God himself. There is a way of praying that is too formal and just pompous. What if my [daughters] called me 'Pastor [Enns]'?...

More than anything else, I'm your dad. And I want no barriers between us.' And so it is with God. It is not reverent to erect barriers of icy formality which Jesus died to tear down. Doing so is pious rebellion. There is no more beautiful reverence in the sight of God than the simple heartcry, 'Abba! Father!' [Ortlund, *Supernatural Living for Natural People*.]

- ✓ There is nothing more natural for the adopted believer to do than to cry out to his Father:

The creepiest sound I have ever heard was nothing at all. My wife, Maria, and I stood in the hallway of an orphanage somewhere in the former Soviet Union, on the first of two trips required for our petition to adopt. Orphanage staff led us down a hallway to greet the two 1-year-olds we hoped would become our sons. The horror wasn't the squalor and the stench, although we at times stifled the urge to vomit and weep. The horror was the quiet of it all. The place was more silent than a funeral home by night.

I stopped and pulled on Maria's elbow. "Why is it so quiet? The place is filled with babies." Both of us compared the stillness with the buzz and punctuated squeals that came from our church nursery back home. Here, if we listened carefully enough, we could hear babies rocking themselves back and forth, the crib slats gently bumping against the walls. These children did not cry, because infants eventually learn to stop crying if no one ever responds to their calls for food, for comfort, for love. No one ever responded to these children. So they stopped.

The silence continued as we entered the boys' room. Little Sergei (now Timothy) smiled at us, dancing up and down while holding the side of his crib. Little Maxim (now Benjamin) stood straight at attention, regal and czar-like. But neither boy made a sound. We read them books filled with words they couldn't understand, about saying goodnight to the moon and cows jumping over the same. But there were no cries, no squeals, no groans. Every day we left at the appointed time in the same way we had entered: in silence.

On the last day of the trip, Maria and I arrived at the moment we had dreaded since the minute we received our adoption referral. We had to tell the boys goodbye, as by law we had to return to the United States and wait for the legal paperwork to be completed before returning to pick them up for good. After hugging and kissing them, we walked out into the quiet hallway as Maria shook with tears.

And that's when we heard the scream.

Little Maxim fell back in his crib and let out a guttural yell. It seemed he knew, maybe for the first time, that he would be heard. On some primal level, he knew he had a father and mother now. I will never forget how the hairs on my arms stood up as I heard the yell. I was struck, maybe for the first time, by the force of the Abba cry passages in the New Testament, ones I had memorized in Vacation Bible School....

Little Maxim's scream changed everything—more, I think, than did the judge's verdict and the notarized paperwork. It was the moment, in his recognizing that he would be heard, that he went from being an orphan to being a son. It was also the moment I became a father, in fact if not in law. [Russell Moore]

- There is nothing more appropriate for a child to do than call out to his Father. And when we cry out to God in this way, it is affirmation of the access we have as believers and it is assurance to our hearts that we are indeed adopted — we no longer are fearful, but we have fellowship as sons.

3. The Spirit Affirms Our Change from CONDEMNATION to CHILDHOOD (vv. 16-17)

- **The Child's POSITION (v. 16)**
 - ✓ Chapters 5-8 are filled with references to our new position in Christ (esp. 6:3ff). In this verse we see affirmation of our position **as children** through the **testimony** (witness) of **the Spirit**.
 - ✓ The Spirit of God offers a testimony, as in a court of Law, to the reality of our sonship. He does that not so much "with our spirit" (in conjunction with our thoughts), but **to our spirit**. He provides affirmation to us in the inner man that we have been justified by Christ and are safe from God's wrath because of Christ.
 - ✓ The question, of course, is *how* the Spirit does that?
 - Some have essentially suggested that it is a mystical experience — we just "know" of the Spirit's testimony.
 - Or it might be a reference to the general fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5) or spiritual gifts (Rom. 12).
 - I don't believe it's mystical; it is actually an objective work of the Spirit. What is the Spirit doing in this passage? He is sanctifying us, but He is specifically sanctifying us by producing mortification of sin in our lives. As the believer fights against and kills sin, he realizes that he is not doing this on his own and that the Spirit is working through him to kill that sin and if the Spirit is in him, then he certainly is a believer. The Spirit's testimony is His work to kill sin in us.
 - ✓ This is also a reminder that we can't give assurance to our sonship by ourselves; only the Spirit of God working in us and through us will provide testimony and assurance of our position with God.
- **The Child's INHERITANCE (v. 17a)**
 - ✓ But not only do we have position as sons with God, but we have all the rights as sons — even the eternal rights of inheritance and heirship.
 - ✓ We are not sons in name only, sons who are barely sons; we are sons in full, with all its benefits.
 - ✓ In fact, Paul says that we are **co-heirs with Christ**. Roman law made all children equal heirs; that seems to be in Paul's mind here. Because of Christ, we will experience the benefits of being sons of God with all the spiritual blessings that come with being God's sons (obviously, as the eternal first born, Christ has rights in Heaven that we do not). Perhaps Paul has mind **Eph. 1:3** or **1 Cor. 3:21-23**.
- **The Child's SUFFERING (v. 17b)**
 - ✓ The word **if indeed** has the sense of "seeing that" or "since we suffer..." It looks to a reality of suffering.
 - ✓ The suffering Paul has in mind here is probably the suffering we experience because we are followers of Christ, living in a world opposed to Him (**Rom. 8:35**; **Col. 1:24**; **Jn. 15:18-20**; **16:33**).

- ✓ This is a reminder that there is no “easy path” to Heaven. Suffering is part of discipleship (2 Tim. 3:12). But these sufferings also bear a particular fruit...
- **The Child’s GLORIFICATION (v. 17c)**
 - ✓ We suffer with Him (like Him and for Him) so that we can be **glorified with Him**.
 - ✓ This does not mean that we gain Heaven and freedom from sin but suffering. Salvation is always by grace through faith.
 - ✓ But it does mean that if you are justified, then you will suffer because of your identification with Christ, and if you suffer because of Christ, it is an indication you have been justified and that you will receive the glorification that has been promised. Just as Jesus suffered and entered His glory, if we are with Him, we will enter that same glory (**1 Pt. 1:10-11**).
- So by affirmation of our sonship to God and our inheritance, suffering, and coming glory, the Spirit again affirms the reality of the believer’s salvation. Our hope is confident because the Spirit has made God our “Daddy.”

CONCLUSION: A few years ago, on Father’s Day, [an adoptive daughter](#) wrote this to her father:

...the Lord has seen fit to bless me with one of the greatest men I know to be my Daddy—you! While biology says you weren’t my original father, love says something else. Blood is the least of what makes a family. Godly love is the real lifeblood of a family. You have loved me like God the Father loved me. A lot of people ask if I’m interesting in meeting my “real” dad. What they mean is, “Do you want to meet your biological dad?”

Daddy, they just don’t seem to get it, do they?!

You are the one who traveled across the world to search me out. You are the one who gave up a comfortable life in order to give me a life. You are the one who rescued me.

I was an orphan, and you chose to call me your own. I was fatherless, and you chose to be my father.

But most important you’ve chosen to love me. You chose to love me the day you saw me and said, “That girl is mine! She’s my little girl now!” And you’ve chosen to love me every day since. I know that many times I haven’t been loveable, but I am your daughter, so you have committed to loving me well, even though I don’t deserve it....

The most precious gift in my life is the heavenly Father choosing me, calling me his, and loving me. You have done the exact same thing. You have modeled the effects of the gospel to me. Because of your choice to adopt me and love me, I have a physical taste of what my spiritual adoption is like.

More important than adopting me and loving me, you have taught me the gospel with your words and illustrated it with your deeds, and as a result my eternity will be spent with our beloved Savior.

The greatest gift anyone can receive is the gift of grace that produces salvation; and one overflow of that gift is our adoption into God’s family. And the Spirit uses that adoption to give us assurance we belong to Him.

BENEDICTION: [Romans 8:37-39](#)