

Romans

Romans Chapter Eight

Romans 8:15

November 21, 2010

This is lesson number **66** in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

“Abba Father”

We are looking at a new subsection of Chapter Eight, vs. 14-17, in which Paul is describing the ‘sons of God,’ or the ‘children of God.’

Romans 8:14-17

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

15 For you did not receive the S{s}pirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, " Abba, Father."

16 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs -- heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Paul is writing to the Christians at Rome and by extension to all believers to give them **assurance** based on their being ‘in Christ.’ Those who have been justified by God are ‘in Christ’ and they have the Holy Spirit living in them.

Those who have the Holy Spirit living in them will necessarily live their lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit and will not be living under the influence of their sinful nature.

The apostle began this argument back in 5:1-2

Romans 5:1-2

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Romans

Last Sunday we looked at verse 14 which says that only those who are constantly being led by the Spirit of God are the ‘sons of God.’ And then we explained what it means to be led by the Spirit of God.

There are many different ideas as to what it is to be led by the Holy Spirit.

There are those who claim that they receive direct revelation from God:
“God told me...” “The Spirit spoke to me...” “Jesus told me ...”

Some of these people who claim to have a ‘word from God’ in many instances have a ‘leading’ that is not in accordance with what the Holy Spirit has given to us through the Scriptures.

These people, as sincere as they may be, are very likely listening to the devil who is a lying spirit.

My position, which I believe to be based on Scripture, is that the Spirit leads the ‘sons of God’ primarily through the Bible.

If this is not true then **subjectivity or feelings** will overrule the Word of God.

Now I am not saying that a person cannot have an impression from God in their mind but it will not be contrary to Scripture if it is the leading of the Holy Spirit.

That I believe is the essence of Romans 8:14:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Therefore the Word of God guides the sons of God.

That is followed by Paul’s next statement:

15 For you did not receive the S{s}pirit of bondage again to fear,...

There is a translation issue here in verse 15 about the use of the lower case in ‘spirit’.

Romans

Back in verse 10 the argument was that the translators should have used lower case 's' to indicate the spirit of man and not capital 'S' which would mean the Holy Spirit.

The contrast that the Apostle is making in verse 10 is that while the body of man 'in Christ' is dead because of sin, the spirit of man is life because of the Holy Spirit who lives in him.

The contrast in verse 10 is between the physical body of man and the spirit of man, not the body of man, and the Holy Spirit.

But here in verse 15 the translators indicate the 'spirit of man' with the lower case 's' when it is, I believe, the Holy Spirit.

Don't the translators know? Well, no they don't.

As an example look at Psalm 25:12:

There is an alternate translation for the word 'He'. The entire meaning is changed depending on who is the 'he'. Is it the man 'he' or is it God, 'He?'

Psalm 25:12

**12 Who is the man that fears the LORD?
Him shall He teach in the way He chooses.
NKJV [or he]**

The marginal notes say that the word 'He' which occurs twice in this verse may be translated 'he'. How can that be?

As I understand it the Hebrew characters are not upper case or lower case and so it is up to the English translator to decide whether to capitalize the word or not. So in Psalm 25 the **context** allows the translator to decide that '**He**' is God who teaches in the way that '**He**' God chooses.

Back to the 'case' of verse 15 in Romans 8, my argument is also from context.

Both in verse 10 and in verse 15 the context tells us whether it is the **spirit** of man or the **Holy Spirit**.

Romans

In verse 10 the context is the **physical body** of man and thus it is the spirit of man.

In verse 15 the context is the leading of the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit to which the Spirit of bondage refers.

It is a translator's choice. To make it even more complicated, the individual pronouns like he, she, it, etc. are built into the verbs, so in this verse all you know is that it is masculine. There is no one for one translation - "he" to "he." However, in this instance, it is most likely that the translator has based the decision upon its similarity to wisdom literature. You could compare it to a proverb. So in this instance, you are correct to say that some verses of scripture have to be translated arbitrarily. Strangely, the Israelites would have known exactly what the author was saying. We do not know how they did that without even a vowel system! While the Greek language does have proper names, it will not always indicate things like "spirit" in Romans. The Hebrew language has neither. You even have to rely on context to be able to tell you whether "elohim" means "God" or "gods." So we are left with the fact that both examples are unfortunately contextual and ambiguous.

To be fair to you I must tell you that this interpretation of 'the spirit of bondage' is not what the majority of expositors say it is.

The highly esteemed Professor John Murray writes:

“The spirit of bondage **cannot be construed** as a reference to the Holy Spirit; it rather means, ‘You did not receive the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of bondage but as the Spirit of adoption.’ ”

So how can the Holy Spirit be said to be the ‘Spirit of bondage again to fear?’ I believe this is referring to Romans 7:7-25.

Paul, as I have pointed out, never seems to completely finish a thought.

So here I believe that the ‘Spirit of bondage’ refers to the condition described in Romans 7:7-25.

I believe that Martyn Lloyd-Jones was correct in his interpretation of Romans 7 even though he stands virtually alone.

Romans

The most common interpretation is that the man of Romans 7 is at the height of Christian maturity. His struggle with sin is so strong that the mature Christian man nearly despairs of sin.

In my understanding Romans 7, explains how the law, when applied by the Spirit of God, gives a man the spiritual understanding of the law. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit the unregenerate man cannot understand the spiritual nature of the holy law of God.

Romans 7:7

What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

The law when applied to the spirit of man by the Holy Spirit convicts a man of sin against the holy and just and good law of God.

Romans 3:20

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

But more to the point is what Lloyd-Jones said was the correct understanding of Romans 7:14-25, that **this is not** describing a Christian at his highest level of spiritual maturity being driven to despair by the knowledge of sin.

It is rather a picture of the man who is trying to be sanctified through the law and the more he tries to improve himself through law keeping the more he is confronted with his sin until he cries out:

Romans 7:24

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

But through the Holy Spirit he realizes that the only relief is in Jesus Christ and he says:

Romans

25 I thank God -- through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Further support for this interpretation that here in vs. 15 the 'Spirit of bondage' refers back to Romans 7:7-25 is found in the use of the word '**again.**'

The 'Spirit of bondage' always precedes the 'Spirit of adoption' and that is seen in the word '**again.**'

To some degree everyone who is a true child of God has had the fear of God made real to him by the Holy Spirit.

There must be some degree of conviction of sin and guilt.

This is what I have been stressing when I talk about 'easy believism.' That is the idea that all a person must do to be saved is to agree with a proposition.

With 'easy believism' there is no call for repentance, just believe the proposition.

Here is a quote from George Whitefield whom God used to bring revival in America in the early 1700s.

"First hear Moses' voice, we hear the voice of the law. There is no going to Mount Zion but by way of Mount Sinai; that is the right straight road. I know some say they do not know when they were converted; those are, I believe, very few: generally, nay, I may say almost always, God deals otherwise. Some are, indeed, called sooner by the Lord than others, but before they are made to see the glory of God, they must hear the voice of the law; so you must hear the voice of the law before ever you will be savingly called unto God."

The law cannot **justify** and the law cannot **sanctify** and the law surely cannot give **assurance**, but the law applied by the Holy Spirit will do its holy work to convict of sin and guilt and then lead a man to Christ.

I am not insisting that everyone must have a dramatic conversion experience. Those who are saved in their early years escape the slavery of overt wickedness and that is a great blessing.

Romans

What I am saying is that there must be some degree of conviction of sin or else you cannot see the glory of what Christ has done for sinners.

Here in 8:15 Paul is assuring the ‘sons of God’ that they will not **‘again’** be subject to living in this bondage of the fear of the law.

Believers in Christ Jesus are **‘dead to the law’** and they have been adopted by God and instead of crying **‘O wretched man that I am!’**

They cry out **“Abba, Father!”**

Praise God, the ‘Spirit of adoption’ gives us the blessed assurance that we are the ‘sons of God.’

In the Model Prayer, Matthew 6:9 ff, where Jesus taught His disciples to pray in this manner, “Our Father in heaven...”

One of the things that most angered the Pharisees was how Jesus called God as His Father. No prophet or rabbi before Jesus ever called God his Father. They were taught not to even to speak His name.

But Jesus not only called God His Father but He taught His disciples to call God their Father also.

And that is what the Spirit of adoption does: God is **“Abba, Father!”**

The word ‘Abba’ is Aramaic and was probably the language that Jesus spoke although He no doubt read and spoke Hebrew in the synagogues and in the temple. He would also know and speak the common Greek language as well as Latin, the language of the Romans.

Abba is a term of endearment and the closest English word would be “papa or daddy.”

There are many things that we could say about this relationship between God and His adopted children. We have a reverential fear and awe of God but there is no dread of punishment.

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Romans

We **'cry out'** is not meant to be a whisper!

We **'cry out'**! The idea is the way a child cries out for his human daddy. The child is not embarrassed by this intimate relationship. He wants his daddy. He is not concerned about whether or not someone hears his cry.

Let me give you a weak example. Suppose you are in the Bright Star and the waitress serves your food and someone begins to pray and thank God.

Are you the least bit embarrassed?

Who cares what people think? **"Abba, Father!"**

So the child of God has the sense of this close relationship with the God and Creator of the universe. He is **"Abba, Father!"**

My burden in this lesson today is to convey the simple truth that as believers in Jesus Christ we are not 'in the Spirit of bondage again to fear,' but we know our relationship with God is as an **adopted child**.

Galatians 4:6-7

6 And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

God willing next time we will deal with what it means to be an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ.

Romans

For now I want to close with a few relevant passages.

John 17:20-23

"I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Hebrews 2:10-13

For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying:

"I will declare Your name to My brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You."

13 And again:

"I will put My trust in Him."

And again:

"Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

Then there is:

1 John 3:1-3

Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.3 And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

Sisters and brothers do you cry out, "**Abba, Father!**"

Has the Holy Spirit taught you that you are a sinner?

Has the Holy Spirit taught you that sinners deserve to be condemned?

Has the Holy Spirit brought you through the Spirit of bondage?

Do you cry out, "**Abba, Father!**"