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## Sonship

Romans 8:1-27

As you know by now in this chapter Paul is discussing the Benefits that Flow from a Saving Relationship with Christ. This morning we are looking at the Fifth Benefit... Sonship. We pick it up in...

Romans 8:14b, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"

This expression denotes a relationship with God which was foreign to the Jewish mind in the First Century. They had a vague notion of the “fatherhood” of God (cf. Isaiah 9:6), BUT no one would have begun a prayer as Christ taught, “Our Father who art in heaven...” (Matthew 6:9)

The irony is that in spite of our Bible study and doctrinal affirmations, the “Fatherhood” of God remains a vague notion to most Christians today. Years ago, Jack Miller observed that many in the church relate to God NOT as a son or daughter, BUT as an orphan! Think of the future of the many Ukrainian children orphaned by this war. In a moment, the culture of a loving family was lost! You can imagine that for many of these children:

- Security will be a massive issue for them. Where will their next meal come from? And how long will that source be available to them? Which orphanage will they end up in? And how long will it be before they are moved to another?
- Trust will be another issue. What adult figure is going to love them like their mom and dad? Their parents assured them that everything would be fine. Do they dare trust another adult?
- Then there will be the issue of self-perception, by which they will be tempted to define themselves by what has happened to them. Theirs is a broken life! So, how important are they? How much do they have to offer?

And such are the practical issues you and I struggle with as children of the living God! While we profess that He is our Father and that we are His children, nevertheless most of the personal problems we struggle with daily revolve around security, trust, and significance, just like orphans!

Do we ever need to hear, accept, and so receive the message Paul gives in the text before us! So, consider with me the fifth benefit that flows from Christ: Sonship! Paul began by addressing the recipients, those who God treats as sons/daughters.

Romans 8:14, “for all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”

Who are the “sons of God”? All who are “being led by the Spirit” which as we saw last time is an important element of the Christian life: “Being Spirit Led.” Now, most interpret “Spirit-led” as a reference to a blessing that is derived from salvation. And because it is a “blessing”, they think of it as something that is “optional” — not all are “Spirit led”!

The thinking goes something like this: IF the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, etc...” AND if I am a child of God who lacks these qualities (personal experience says that not all in Christ manifest love, joy, peace, etc.), THEN the blessing of being “led by the Spirit” is enjoyed by some, *those who are obedient!*

Yet that is wrong. Don't confuse "being Spirit filled" and "being Spirit led." The former is a response of faith to the Spirit's direction as given in God's word. The latter is a description of what happens to the sinner when once they become a Christian. The Spirit enters into their being, and they become Spirit-Led.

Galatians 5:18, "But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law."

This clearly indicates that if a person is saved (and so freed from relating to God on the basis of their own works), they are "led by the Spirit." And so, it is in the text before us. Sonship is NOT something that comes as we obey the Spirit of God. Rather, it is that which a person becomes when once the Spirit of God delivers them from their sin, or better, leads them from death to life! We see it in such passages as John 1.

John 1:12a, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God..."

Sonship is the birthright of all in Christ!

Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

If you are saved, then you are a Son/Daughter of the living God! And this is so important! The mind of an orphan thinks that Sonship is violable, and we see it in the Prodigal Son.

Luke 15:18-19, "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

That is the Orphan Ethic! We are just like the Prodigal when we sin enough times. During these times, we feel distant from God, alienated! We believe that if we dared to enter into God's presence, we would receive the frowning gaze of a very disappointed God! And so, because of our sin, we've learned to live as an Orphan!

Yet from our text we see truly that this thinking is wrong! If you are a child of God, obedient or disobedient, you are a Son/Daughter of God and therefore possess at all times freedom from fear.

Romans 8:15a, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again."

This is the first privilege of sonship, NO FEAR! In Paul's day, the slave was the property of the owner, and thus subject to his will and whim. As a result, there were massive

elements of “fear” associated it: Will you be sold? At some point will your family be broken up? What about a harsh or cruel owner? What if times got tough? If your master fell into ruin, how would you eat? J. B. Lightfoot described that which Onesimus faced as a runaway slave,

Roman law... practically imposed no limits to the power of the master over his slave. [Thus] the alternative of life or death rested solely with Philemon [his owner], and slaves were constantly crucified for far lighter offenses than his. (Lightfoot, 1875, p. 314)

Romans 8:15b, “...but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.”

Paul is the only one uses this word of believers in all of Scripture. The reason being is that “adoption” was NOT a Jewish word, on account of the structure of the Covenant Community, adoptions did NOT occur in the Old Testament

As such, it is almost universally accepted that the background for Paul’s use of “Adoption” comes from Rome. Roman Adoption involved carefully prescribed legal procedures. In the case of a boy:

1. The first step severed his legal/social relationship from his slave/natural family.
2. The second step placed him permanently into the new family where he was granted the full legal rights/privileges of sonship in the family. All of his previous debts and obligations were eradicated. And, in the case of the adoption of a slave, the boy was set free and granted the rights and privileges of Roman Citizenship!

So, in Rome never was there a distinction between true born children and adopted children. The moment a person was adopted they became a son — legally, relationally, and practically! And so, though we were formerly slaves of Satan, in Christ we have become Sons/Daughters of God and with it the legal, relational, and practical rights of Sonship!

That means while Satan may rule his household with fear, we must understand that in Christ all fear is gone:

1. Never will we or could we be Condemned, Romans 8:1-4a,
2. At all times we have Fellowship with God, Romans 8:4b-8, and
3. Our lives have been Transformed once and for all, Romans 8:9-11! Accordingly, no matter how far we have fallen or how great may be our sin, at all times and in all places, we are God’s beloved Children!
4. That means “fear,” “dread,” or “gloominess” when it comes to our relationship with God must be forever gone! The knowledge of God’s “perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18)!<sup>1</sup>

## Intimacy with God, v. 15c.

Romans 8:15c, “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’”

As most of you know, these typically were the first words uttered by a child, “Daddy!” Thus, as a description of the cry of the child of God it denotes a close, intimate, and abiding relationship with God. G. Schrenk said this:

...an everyday infant sound is applied without inhibition to God... This basic word tells us that God is not a distant Ruler in transcendence but One who is intimately close. (Morris, 2012, p. 316)

Think of it: if addressing God in prayer with, “Our Father” (Matthew 9:6) was too intimate or informal, this passage puts that address on steroids, “Our Daddy” or “Our dear Father.”

Who is there in this world that can address God in this manner other than a son of God? NO ONE! This appellation is reserved only for the child of God, you and me!

And once again, it is without condition! When a person enters into a saving relationship with Christ, how much of their sin did they confess? NOT all of their sin, BUT all that they knew! Thinking of percentages, how much of their sin did they know of at the time of their conversion? It most certainly would NOT have been a large percentage — for part and parcel of our growth in grace is a growth in our understanding of the greatness of our sin.

Shortly after Paul was first saved, he confessed that he was “the least of the Apostles” (1 Corinthians 15:9). About five years later, Paul made the confession that in fact he was “the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8). And then a couple years after that, as Paul lived more of his life and failed, he told Timothy that he was “the foremost of sinners” (1 Timothy 1:15)! Think of it: in heaven as we grow in our understanding of God, we will continue to grow in our understanding of how wretched our sin was and so how great God’s grace is! In light of this, I would conclude that the typical Christian over their life might come to know 1% of their sin. The really godly man or woman might arrive at 2% of their sin.

In light of that, let me ask you: as a son or daughter when you come to a greater realization that you are in fact a sinner — that your sin truly is odious before God — what is the appropriate response? Should we adopt the orphan mentality by which we purpose to relate to God as a slave? Or should we as hurting children run to God knowing that when God adopted us, He was well-aware of this and everyone of our

sins? That leads to the third Privilege of Sonship...

[Assurance, v. 16.](#)

Romans 8:16, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." - the better translation would be "TO our spirit."

For how can our miserably weak spirits by themselves testify to anything pertaining to the kingdom of God? As Cranfield rightly asked, "What standing has our spirit in this matter?" (Morris, 2012, p. 317)

Indeed, the issue addressed in this verse is the testimony that the Spirit of God gives to us, namely that we are God's children!

Now, HOW the Spirit of God does this, Paul does NOT indicate. Is it via the word? Our changed life? Illuminating grace? An inward sense of confidence? Again, Paul does NOT say, <sup>2</sup> HOWEVER, at minimum we can say that however the Spirit assures us it will be BY AND WITH His Word! And so, as we grow in our walk with Christ and become more attuned to the Spirit as He reveals Himself in His word, assurance of our salvation will increase as our view of ourselves decreases! Think of it from the perspective of the Prodigal.

[The Prodigal, Luke 15.](#)

Though he disregarded his father, when the prodigal returned home, he still was his father's son (in spite of what he thought)! Accordingly, notice the father's response to his son *before* his son could finish his planned confession of sin.

Luke 15:22a, "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him...'"

This was a status symbol (cf. Gen. 41:42). In the eyes of the father, his son was most important, and so this rebellious boy was clothed with the "best robe."

Luke 15:22b, "'...and put a ring on his hand...'"

This most likely was a signet ring (cf. again Gen. 41:42) which was an indication of authority- royal authority. IOW, the father was saying here, "Not only are you my son [by virtue of the robe], but to you I give authority over my house."<sup>3</sup>

Luke 15:22c, "'...and put... sandals on his feet...'"

The significance in this is that in Christ's day slaves did not wear sandals. That the father put sandals on his rebellious son's feet indicated that his son was NOT to be treated as a

slave, BUT, as he really was, HIS child! There is no talk of second-class citizens in God's Kingdom! Regardless of the life you have lived as a believer, you always have and will remain His Son/Daughter!

Luke 15:23, "...and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry."

In Christ's day, the diet of most Jews rarely contained meat; it was too expensive. As such, the slaughtering of a fattened calf occurred on very special and rare occasions/guests. In essence, the father here was saying to his son that there was no one more important than him! And this testifies to a very important truth: There is NOT a sin that we can commit that can forfeit our standing as a child of God!

If you agree with that this, you have just received the testimony of the Spirit to your spirit! Truly on account of Christ, we are and will forever be His children!! Notice a fourth Benefit of Sonship...

[An Inheritance, v. 17a.](#)

Romans 8:17a, "And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..." -

Generally speaking, "heir" refers to one who receives the property of another upon the other person's death. That being said, note that Paul's use of this term is NOT general BUT specific: Paul was a Jew. As such, Paul's use of "heir" here is packed with theological significance. See:

- In the mind of the Jew, to be the people of God was to be an heir of all that was promised in the Covenant of Grace. Now, the most comprehensive element that stood as a summary of all that was promised in the Covenant of Grace was the Promise of Land which was much more than a geographical location in the Near East, BUT the promise of a Renewed Land- a city whose founder and builder was God (Hebrews 11:16)!
- And that is why in the NT the theme of "land" is so often referenced...

Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth."

A reference NOT to the present earth BUT the New Heavens and NEW EARTH! At the Last Judgment:

Matthew 25:34, "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

And thus, to be an “heir” in the Biblical sense is to be a recipient of all the blessings that are associated with the New Heavens and New Earth- the land of our ultimate inheritance!

With that, notice in this text that we are said to be “heirs of God” and “fellow heirs with Christ.” Both of these are titles of dignity. Ultimately, God is our inheritance and that which we receive is nothing less than what Christ Himself received from God: Glory & Honor (cf. John 17:5)! As sons and daughters of God, we have a bright and glorious future ahead of us!<sup>4</sup> And that brings us to the calling of the sons of God.

### The Calling of All Sons/Daughters of God, v. 17b.

Romans 8:17b, “And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* in order that we may also be glorified with *Him*.”

The phrase seems to imply an element of doubt, “*if indeed*.” However, the idea in the Greek is NOT one of doubt, BUT certainty as it could be translated as, “Since indeed” or “If as is the case, we suffer with Him...”

From this we conclude that as a child of God we are going to suffer! (cf. Philemon 1:29) Yet because we are Sons and Daughters of God, we ought NOT to be surprised by suffering NOR ought we to be quickly moved from our composure and confidence as God’s children. That’s the emphasis of the language here...

Romans 8:17b, “...since indeed we suffer WITH HIM...”

Did you notice that the text did NOT say, “for Him” but “with Him”? Now that we are Sons and Daughters of God, we approach any and all suffering with the understanding that it is NOT discipline BUT Privilege — for it is a ministry to which God has called those whom He loves. And so, all suffering we encounter as Sons/Daughters of God is sanctified, yet it also is eternally significant. Notice the next statement:

Romans 8:17b, “...since indeed we suffer with Him in order that [or ‘unto the end that’] we may also be glorified with Him.”

This should blow us away! NOT ONLY do we get to “suffer with Christ”, BUT the end result is that all earthly suffering prepares us for a greater experiencing of glory in the New Heavens and Earth! It is as Paul said in 2 Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 4:17-18, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”



Truly, NOT ONLY do we GET to suffer with Christ, BUT all suffering is ordained by God to prepare us to co-reign with Christ in glory! Such is the calling that accompanies Sonship! What therefore ought we to do when trial and difficulty descend upon us? To a group of congregations suffering far more than most of us could imagine, the Hebrew writer exhorted them this way:

Hebrews 10:35-36, "Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised."

May God grant us the grace to heed this message, and so thrive when the time of testing comes! We are Sons and Daughters of God. Let us suffer accordingly!

## References

- Lightfoot, J. B. (1875). *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. London: MacMillan and Co.
- Morris, L. (2012). *The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Erdmans.

## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> If therefore you should have it, it has no basis! It is like the pain that the amputee experiences from the limb that is not there! Accordingly, as a child of God gaze upon God's perfect love for you and so be done with fear!

<sup>2</sup> If you pressed Paul as to how the Spirit assures of us our standing before God, no doubt it would involve a growing mourning over one's sins which produce a greater reliance upon Christ. Again, recall Paul's testimony as a son of God, "...Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all." (1 Timothy 1:15b) Such is the description of Christ gave of the genuine child of God, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:3, 4)

<sup>3</sup> cf. also 1 Maccabees 6:15; Josephus Antiquities 12:360; Esther 3:10; 8:8.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, according to the book of Revelation, we shall (1) Inherit both a New Name (Revelation 3:12) and a Crown of gold (Revelation 4:4; cf. 14:14), (2) Reign with Christ (Revelation 20:4), and (3) Sit beside Christ as He reigns on His throne (Revelation 3:21). To be sure, much of this is symbolic. Yet, the language reveals the magnitude and nature of the inheritance we have in Christ on account of our position in Christ: we are sons!