

# The Spirit and Adoption

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Romans 8:16

Ecclesiastes 6.1-2 speaks of a man who has been given everything by God – riches, wealth and honor, so his soul lacks nothing of all he desires. But the verse goes on: “yet God has not empowered him to eat from them”!

We learn here that God must give the inward enjoyment otherwise the outward goods are empty and useless!

We are still on the same topic as last time – the high privilege of our adoption by God the Father. There is no higher title than to be called a child of God, an heir of God, a joint heir with Jesus!

One area we left untouched last time was how adoption was not practiced widely in the Old Testament, but it was very frequent in Roman culture. Childlessness in the OT led to concubines and second wives – and problems! But Romans frequently adopted their own slaves or servants ahead of natural children! And that is what Paul seems to pick up on as he uses this word, ‘adoption’ in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

But you can see the problem here, can’t you? How does a once-slave become comfortable with being treated as a son, knowing he is not naturally so? In that culture, the only assurance came when the father died, who had the right to withdraw the status.

Adopted children today can fear similar things. Our missionary to Uganda, Tony Curto, adopted three sons from Africa, and raised them as his own. But when Tony’s other children were adults and moved out, they came to their father and asked if he was going to send them away now! Of course, he wouldn’t! But they needed assuring.

As we return to the adoption of the Bible, with this Father and with these sons, everything is quite reversed by this one, glorious word: GRACE!

Rather than the father benefitting from the adopted child – that he will fulfill his expectations; the adoption of grace is reversed; we are the full beneficiaries.

God did not save you for what He could get out of you/ He saved you because He loved you, pure and simple. He loved you when you were unlovely. He did not pick the best candidates for his house. He chose the least and the ill-fitted.

Our message today is how the bridge is built between this phenomenal privilege – “Behold! What Manner! Of Love! That we should be called the children of God!” And our once enslaved, alienated and stranger-lives to God.

And the answer is in one word: the Spirit, in verse 16; the Spirit Himself, no less than the Spirit, the Spirit and no other, does this.

As Paul hinted at this back in Rom. 5.5: “God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”

The Spirit familiarizes us to this greatest of all privileges; this new status. What a great word – familiarize! Make one of the family inside as well as outside!

He is not to us a Spirit of bondage or slavery unto fear again. No! Much rather, He is a Spirit of Adoption; part of the privilege granted by the Father is to send forth the Spirit of his Son Jesus, who redeemed us out of bondage,. And if the Son has made you free, you shall be free indeed!!

The Spirit accustoms and assures us of our place in the house, at the table, with God our Father. This is such a pivotal matter here. Paul is showing us the security of the Christian, with the Spirit's aid given to them, of eternal glory prepared for them, and the Lord's purpose leading them there.

How do I know I am a child of God? How do I know this privilege is mine? A stupendous privilege! higher than the status of angels!?

Am I an heir of heaven? A co-heir with Jesus? Inheriting glory with Christ?

It is not an angel or a man or any other created being that brings about your assurance to your claim. It is the living God Himself who seals this to you.

The Spirit of God fits us into the body and the kingdom family of God. How else could it be? Can any without God's help accept and be assured of such great and incredible truth? The Holy Spirit is needed, is vital, is central, to accepting, acclimating and assuring the believer of such glorious things!

This is why I almost would rename our message: "Better than Heaven." God giving you heaven without a heart for heaven, an assurance for heaven, would be lost on us.

Let us see three qualities of how the Spirit assures us of being heirs of God.

The first is in verse 14 – all who are led by the Spirit of God – these are sons of God.

The second is in verse 15 – by the Spirit of adoption, we cry out, Abba, Father. This speaks of the true connection with God as Father through the Son.

The third is in verse 16 – the Spirit is the seal of your salvation, who witnesses to you and in you of your adoption. This is the internal testimony of the Spirit.

We covered the first in verse 14. All who are led by the Spirit; these are the sons of God.

How do we know we are led by the Spirit of God? The Spirit has changed us. We are no longer under sin as a king. You are no longer obligated to follow the old way of life, the flesh. The Holy Spirit has changed you in your minds, your hearts, your wills. You are a new creature and it shows in your new life.

Why even your struggles with the old life are proof of the change – as we saw not too long ago in Romans 7.

Your thought-life is converted. You are being transformed by the renewing of your mind. And how does that take place if not by the Spirit shining in you by the Scriptures?

This doesn't just stay in your head however. Your heart, your affections, your desires and delights are changed. They too are being sanctified in Christ. As

Edwards put it, there is a *new affection* for those things that are above. You are restless here and God now is your chief desire. Love is poured out inwardly by the Spirit, who produces his fruit in this good tree.

And it is the Spirit who moves you to action. He is the God at work in you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure. As the Spirit puts to death self-centeredness, he continues to cause growth and maturity, being zealous for good deeds.

So the first answer of how the Spirit familiarizes and assures you, can be found by looking in the mirror. Can you see – as well as others – that you have been amazingly and wonderfully remade! You are his workmanship, made new, and putting on the new man or woman re-created through Christ Jesus.

“I know I am a son of God because God made me so, renewed me, quickened me, and my life continues to show that change!”

Your attitude toward Christ, his cross, your sins, your life, issues of heaven and earth, matters of wisdom and folly, good and evil, righteousness and wickedness, all are have a new phone number, a new address, because you are a new you!

Being led – this is the first proof.

Then **secondly**; there is a personal union and communion known and felt in the heart of the child of God – verse 15. (Read)

We saw last week how the Spirit inspires prayer in us. In the parallel account of Galatians, He is the Spirit of the *Son* and it is the Spirit who is crying out, not we, “Abba! Father!”

So a very crucial and vital thing here: if we do not have the Spirit, we do not have Christ, and we do not have prayer, and we do not have God as our Father! Slaves do not cry out, Papa! Dear Father!

All children of God are indwelt by the Spirit. This appears in our personal communion with our God and Savior.

We emphasized last week the warm, cordial and close quality of these words. And we do not take anything away from that.

But there is more here, which is found right next to the name, “Abba” – that is the verb, ‘CRY’.

This is a word indicating great desperation. It is parked right next to these terms of warmth and closeness. The word, *krazzein*, sounds like what it means; an intense sound of an intense feeling.

Sinclair Ferguson points to its usage in the OT of loud cries and intense emotion. It is found in Job, for instance, and the Psalms. When we turn to the NT, the screams of the demoniac piercing the night uses this word, as well as of the shrieks of the epileptic boy in Mk. 9.26. When blind Bartimaeus will not be shut up, this word is used in Mk. 10. And even our Lord Jesus crying out on the cross as he gives up his spirit, with a loud voice.

This word, says Ferguson, brings an atmosphere of crises and not tranquility.

If that is so, we find that God is the Father of his children in their deepest and dreadful needs! Your Father is your Father not just in the heights but in the depths; not just when you have it all together (which is never), but especially when you do not.

Assurance is for all believers, the new and neediest, as well as seasoned and successful servants of Jesus. Isn't divine assurance needed by all? The neediest and the least needy? We never outgrow this cry – “Our Father in heaven!”  
Abba, Father!

So this is an assurance *within* as well as *without*. Not seen in the mirror but in the heart. We can witness ourselves going to God in His Spirit to receive help in time of need. The Spirit keeps us from despair, from fully or finally casting God off. No, the greater the need, the greater our cry. And the greater our need,

the closer God draws near; the closer Jesus feels our infirmities and draws out his compassions; and the closer the Spirit, perhaps whom we have grieved, holds us and brings the work of conviction and repentance toward God. He is not a God afar off.

Psalm 75 begins beautifully: *We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks, for Your name is near; men declare Your wondrous works.*

His most wondrous work is salvation; and his near name is FATHER!

So here is the **second** fitting the Spirit works in each child of God. He works a dependence upon God in a warm, loving connection – a connection which we will see is unbreakable, inseparable. We find this in our prayer-life, our desiring God, our communion with him, our very worship – which is the pinnacle of devotion and service. You feel yourselves to be living temples of God, don't you? That you are not your own – but indwelt and filled with the Spirit of grace!

A new Spirit will I put in them, says Ezekiel. This is the assurance of faith, this internal proof of the Spirit's work in adoption, familiarizing us to glory. Heaven enters us before we enter heaven; heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.

This brings us **thirdly** to verse 16 – after experiencing the leading of the Spirit and crying out deeply to our Father through Jesus, the co-witness of the Holy Spirit with our spirits is put before us now.

This is understood as a distinctly different part of our assurance – of the Spirit's direct seal upon the believer that he or she is a child of God. The theological Latin phrase is: *'Testimonium Spiritus Sancti Internum'* [Better write that down – there's going to be a test later! Ha ha!]

Now this has caused some controversy. There are those who don't see anything different here in 16 than what we just said in point number 2. There are those

who say this witness of the Spirit to adoption is our response of prayer to the work of grace in us.

But others correctly see something more.

Notice that in 15, we cry; but in 16, the Spirit witnesses to us, or along with our spirits, but not through us.

In 15, the Spirit's witness is with ours; but 16 has to our spirits. And this is parallel with our praying later in the chapter, where we pray and the Spirit also prays, verses 23 and 26.

Paul is tying in with the union the child of God, with what he says in verse 17.

Four compound verbs are there, all having the same prefix, SUN-, which means "with" – you are *with-heirs* with Jesus, *with-glorified* with Jesus, and *with-sufferers* with Jesus.

Here, it is not you but the Spirit who is a *with-witness*; a co-witness; alongside of the witness of your own human spirits in verse 15.

This word is used only three times in the NT, and all by Paul, and all in Romans.

In 2.15 – there is a with-witness of the conscience with the requirements of the law in the hearts of men; a distinct and second witness.

In Rom. 9.1 – the conscience of Paul in the Holy Spirit confirming what Paul is saying with his mouth, is truth. So two distinct witness; Paul's conscience and his word.

It seems the same in Romans 8.16: two witnesses at work within the Christian.

Some see a distinct and separate action of the Spirit at work, while others coordinate it with the Spirit praying through us, crying 'Abba Father.'

But many solid writers say different, like James Boice:

One thing is clear. There is a contrast between verse 15, in which *we* give testimony to this new relationship, crying “*Abba, Father,*” and verse 16, in which the Holy Spirit *himself* bears witness... What I am convinced this teaches is that there is such a thing as a direct witness of the Holy Spirit to believers that they are sons or daughters of God... In other words, it is possible to have a genuine *experience* of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart...Haven’t you ever had such an experience? An overwhelming sense of God’s presence? Or haven’t you at some point, perhaps at many points in your life, been aware that God has come upon you in a special way and that there is no doubt whatever that what you are experiencing is from God? pp 843-844.

Haldane writes that this is a testimony designed for the satisfaction of believers themselves, and cannot be submitted to the scrutiny of others.

Ferguson holds a co-ordinated witness with one cry from two sources: the consciousness of the believer led by the Spirit, and the Spirit who is the seal of God’s children. Warfield too: ‘distinct in source, it is yet delivered confluent with the testimony of our own consciousness.’

So there are two witnesses by which your new life as children of God are established! Which brings us to our close and a few **applications**:

**First**, praise God for this part of your salvation. Your adoption is documented not on paper but in your hearts, by the Spirit Himself who is the earnest and foretaste of heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul asserts: *you are a letter of Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.*

Not only is your salvation all in his hands; so is the assurance of it.

**Secondly**, how important this all is for a comfortable walk with God. Assurance does not minister to loose living. Who is better equipped to run, to



serve, to worship and pray? The man who doubts his place at the Father's table every moment, or the child of God confident he is on his way to glory?

***Third***, these facts minister to the commands of God on your life. There are no commands in Romans 8! Remember? But in Ephesians 4 and 5, oh, how we are to walk worthy of this God and Savior! A high, holy, heavenly calling is upon you – “Therefore BE imitators of God – ***as beloved children***! Walk in love, even as Christ His Son loved us and gave Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, a sweet-smelling service.

Go, and do likewise! Amen