

# A Spirit-Filled Life, part 3: The Spirit of Adoption

*Romans 8:11-17*

**What comes into your mind when I say the word Father?** Many of us have happy memories and thoughts of the men who raised us. I won't pretend that fatherhood isn't a difficult topic for others. I would rather not dwell on this question too long, but I do want to point out that our experience of fatherhood is profoundly impactful on the human experience.

Today I want to tell you about a **Father who is better than you could ever dream, and dear christian, he wants you to have a relationship with Him.**

*This is a sermon about the Holy Spirit bringing us into relationship with our perfect heavenly Father through the redemptive work of Christ.*

## Stitching

This is the third installment in a series on the important, but often misunderstood and misapplied, **doctrine of the Holy Spirit**. Although we could continue this study for quite some time, our goal with this message is to conclude the study by seeing the core ministry of the Holy Spirit in action in the life of the believer. In **part 1, we saw an overview of the Holy Spirit as he is revealed throughout scripture**. He is a person, and is prevalent throughout the scripture. His chief work is saving and sanctifying sinners. **In part 2 we saw that he accomplishes this work through replacing the heart of stone with a heart of flesh**. He is at work in the life of believers to change their desires, will, and actions so that we become like Jesus from the inside out.

It's essential to note that the Spirit's ministry is all about Christ. In John 16 we have clear teaching about His role in the plan of redemption.

*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. John 16:13-14*

The clear teaching of Jesus on the ministry of the Holy Spirit is that He **glorifies Christ**.

## Context

Now we turn to the book of Romans. As is always the case in scripture, our passage is part of a **greater context**. Jews were kicked out of Rome by the emperor Claudius in the early 40s. Overnight, **the church became gentile**. Just a few years before this letter was written, the government allowed the Jews to come back, and once again, overnight **the church became mixed jew and gentile**. The problem is that they're having trouble getting along because their ways of life are very different.

**Paul lays out an explanation of our spiritual union with Christ in Romans 6.**

*Romans 6:5-8 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

We are united with Christ in his death to share in **His resurrection**. This is not symbolic, nor is it an overstatement. **Union with Christ is at the heart of the gospel.**

He lived the life we couldn't and then was crucified and buried. In his death, he paid the **just penalty** for sin that we earned. Paul is saying that His death is our death. **Because we died with Christ, we will share in his resurrection.**

With this foundation, the apostle shifts focus. Based on this spiritual union with Christ, **what should Christians, Jew and gentile do with the law?** In 7:6-7 Paul introduces the Spirit to the discussion. He is abundantly clear. **The law is not bad because it shows us our need for Christ. However, eternal life is based on our union with Jesus, not our ability to keep the law.** Because the flesh cannot earn peace with God through obedience, we come to the marvelous conclusion of 8:1 *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

**Paul explains that the Holy Spirit is the one who does the work of uniting us to Christ and applying his redemptive work on the cross to lost, dead souls.** The flesh cannot bring salvation. Your efforts to clean up your life nor your knowledge of the bible can take away your guilt before God. We cannot do the work to **save ourselves**, but Jesus did. This is the point, **if you are a Christian by faith, then you have the Holy Spirit.** Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. **Through the work of the Spirit, we are united with Christ.**

*Our relationship with Christ is meant to be experienced. Adoption is the saving work of the Holy Spirit as He applies the redemptive work of Christ by helping us to take off the flesh, put on Christ, and experience our relationship with God now and forevermore.* This truth comes from these four points:

1. The same Spirit that resurrected Jesus from the grave indwells believers
2. Sin can only be killed by the life-giving power of the Spirit
3. The Holy Spirit facilitates an experiential relationship between the Father and His Children
4. The Spirit's ultimate ministry of adoption is to bring us into life beyond the grave.

**Pray and read**

## Redemption Secured

*The Spirit's ministry is to apply Christ's work to believers. VII "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

We hear echos of John 16 in this passage. We must not drive a wedge between the Holy Spirit, the Father, and the Son. They share **one purpose in redemption**. The Father decrees, the Son atones, and the Spirit applies the work to the believer. It makes sense then that Paul emphasizes Jesus' resurrection in connection with the Holy Spirit's ministry.

**Twice, Paul mentions that Jesus is risen from the dead.** We cannot make too much of the resurrection of Christ. It is truth. The resurrection is the **fact of history** by which all men will be judged. *1 Corinthians 15:17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.* In other words, if there is no resurrection, there is no point to any of this. Christianity is not about traditions and being a good person. Christianity is about the cross. The **cross is about more** than just living like Jesus or being a good citizen. **The cross is ultimately about the defeat of death.** Christ has gone before us, not only as a sacrifice to satisfy God's just wrath for sin, but he has blazed the trail into the resurrection, and he was resurrected with a physical body.

**Do you think about Christ having ascended to heaven with a physical body?** Post resurrection, he tells Thomas *"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side..."* Just a few verses later, we see him **eating breakfast** with Peter. Perhaps it seems like a tangent to belabor this point, but I promise it's relevant. **Christ is our example of what to expect about resurrected life in the new heaven and earth.** He didn't shed his body when he ascended to heaven. In fact, *Revelation 14:14 "Then I looked, and behold a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head..."* That seems to indicate that his being one like a son of man is an integral part of his dominion.

We were created in the image of God, but He represents us before the Father as one like a son of Man, in a physical, resurrected body. He continues his **priestly ministry**, forever seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding on our behalf. If you want to know what we will be like post resurrection, **look to Christ as our example.** Is he different post resurrection? Of course, as we will be, but he is not unrecognizable.

We have been given a **promise**. Because the Holy Spirit dwells with all believers, all who believe in Jesus will experience not only a relationship with God now, but a future resurrection and glorification, which is our **final destination** as believers.

If we are honest, this emphasis on the bodily resurrection is not that common in our day. It doesn't seem all that practical. In fact, it seems so far away. It makes me think of **driving through the desert** towards a destination. The roads are flat and straight, and it seems like you can see your destination for hours without making any progress towards it. Soon enough, time passes and you're no longer in the desert. That's what happens with this life that we are living.

As **surely as Jesus is risen** from the dead, we too will rise again from the grave. The redemption of the body is so sure that the apostle Paul speaks of those who have passed from this life as believers as merely having **fallen asleep in Christ**. Let this be a **comfort** to you as you grow older and the **body and the mind** begin to breakdown. Even as you pass from this life, God will not abandon you.

*The Spirit's ministry of adoption finds its destination in the resurrection of the body.* The Spirit's guarantee of this resurrection is our basis for putting to death the deeds of the flesh.

## Redemption Victorious

*The Spirit's ministry is to kill sin in us, preparing us to receive our inheritance.*

*V 12-13. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Notice the jump from the promised resurrection to **killing sin**. Paul's logic is this: we have the Spirit dwelling in us, so we will be resurrected, so put the flesh to death by the power of the Spirit.

We are **debtors**. This word is used for someone who has an obligation. Often, it carried a connotation of sin, but not always. **As the Holy Spirit indwells us, we have an obligation to put to death the deeds of the flesh.**

We are not talking about having a legal debt created by sin. Colossians 2 is clear; that debt has been cancelled. Having this obligation to put the flesh to death does not **undermine God's grace**. It's the opposite. Only by the power of the Spirit can we kill the flesh, and you must kill the flesh. The means by which we are to accomplish this mission is the Spirit of God, not our strength.

**You cannot kill flesh with flesh.** It's like saving someone from drowning by holding them underwater, or stitching a cut by lopping off the hand, or fixing a gas leak with a torch. Even clinging to creeds and confessions without a heart that is right before the Lord can only make you a pharisee. We can so easily get caught up in the **hamster wheel** of works-based righteousness, and even works-based sanctification. It will suck the life out of you and everyone around you. When you are burnt out from trying to reach an impossible standard in the power of the flesh, the enemy is pleased to take advantage and present you with an opportunity to sin against the Christ you say you love. We need grace.

**There is a warning here.** This warning is strong. You **MUST** put to death the deeds of the flesh. It's not extremely obvious in the ESV, but in the phrase "not to the flesh" Paul abandons his thought to warn his readers that they must kill the flesh. It gives you a sense of the urgency in Paul's mindset. Grace is always transformative. You have received the Spirit of adoption, so you belong to Christ. Therefore, you will be resurrected. Yet, **Sin is still dangerous**. It must still be conquered. It will only be conquered by grace in the power of the Holy Spirit. By grace, God works in you to put off the old man and put on Christ. By grace, God himself comes to dwell in you as a guarantee and seal that He will carry you safely through this life, transforming you into the image of Christ along the way, until you receive the resurrection of the body.

**What is the flesh?** I want to be clear, I'm not speaking of doing literal damage to your body. This is a hebraism that refers to human and sin nature, and is sometimes positioned opposite the Spirit. In this context, it is using the law to grow in holiness instead of God's grace supplied by the Spirit. It's

engaging the Spirit of fear because when we are afraid, our desire for control goes through the roof. When we would do anything for control, we forget that we are not God.

Contrast the flesh with the Spirit. **How do we know that we aren't acting in the flesh?** *All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.* To be led by the Spirit is not to have mystical experiences where you receive some sort of revelation from God. Galatians 5 uses this phrase to describe people whose desires are being renewed so that they don't give in to the works of the flesh. Instead, they harvest the fruits of the Spirit. We don't need to add rules and we don't need less than what he has given us in scripture to live a life that is honoring to the Lord as we seek to kill our sin by the power of the Spirit. We don't need to confuse things with mystical and subjective experiences that can never be questioned. Being led by the Spirit is about living a transformed life, by the grace of God, where we produce the fruits of the Spirit rather than the works of the flesh.

**Does the glory for your holiness go to Christ or self?** Which is the most powerful force in your life? Embarrassment, fear, or love for God? How strongly do the promises of God affect your heart?

**Remember, the Spirit's ministry in the resurrection of the body is the point.** This should help us to understand killing sin even more profoundly. **Our obedience to God flows out of looking forward to the resurrection which God has promised us.** We are living in the already, not yet. We have already been adopted, but not yet received our inheritance. So, we are set apart from the world to enjoy the eternal life which rightfully is ours but not removed from it.

**This truth guides away from legalism and into true holiness.** Do you struggle with feeling like God owes you something? Do you constantly make comparisons against other believers? Have you found peace with God as your loving, kind, and merciful heavenly Father, or is God a harsh judge which you will never please?

**By the Spirit of adoption we are to kill sin because of the promises of God, not the law in the power of the flesh.** The purpose of killing sin is to enjoy God.

## Redemption Enjoyed

*The Spirit's ministry is to facilitate an eternal and experiential relationship with God.*

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

Notice the opposition of the spirit of slavery and the spirit of adoption, which is intended to accent the greatness of adoption by the Spirit. Keeping the law in the flesh brings death. It brings bondage to guilt and cannot satisfy God's requirements for righteousness. It brings **fear that cannot result in joy.**

**Through the ministry of the Spirit, we not only receive the forgiveness of sins and the power to kill sin, but we are brought into the family of God.** Which is greater, a slave or a son? Consider

**Joseph.** Joseph was at the top of the slaves in Potiphar's house. There was nothing that was not given to him. Yet, when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of abusing her, he lost everything and was thrown into jail.

On the other hand, consider **Absalom**. He betrayed his father David and spent many years trying to steal the throne. When he died, How did David respond? David wept crying out *"Oh my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, oh Absalom, my son, my son!"* 2 Samuel 18:33.

What we have is far greater than law keeping and being right. We have a relationship of grace with our heavenly Father. Unlike Israel at Mount Sinai where they were told to stay away from the mountain and look from afar as God's presence descended, you and I are commanded to come into God's presence.

*Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16*

**This ministry of Adoption can be summarized in two parts: communion with God now and the resurrection yet to come.** Our passage states that it is by the Spirit of adoption we cry out "Abba Father." Many will say that this is like a child calling out for daddy. That statement is culturally accurate, but I think it's far more significant that we see it being used as the **unique way that Jesus talked to the Father in prayer.** *"Abba in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* Or Jesus as he is sweating drops of blood in the garden of Gethsemane because he is about to be arrested to go to the cross. He prays, *"Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me..."* Mark 14:36.

**The tenderness of the expression points us to the fact that our adoption enables and encourages us to come to God in the darkest moments of our lives.** We are not only invited but commanded to cry out to God our heavenly Father for salvation from our sins, for faith when our faith is weak, and hope when the world around us grows cold to the only one who is life. Though the quality of our relationship with God can suffer when we plant the seeds of the flesh instead of the seeds of the spirit, our status as sons cannot.

**This ministry of adoption is intended to be experienced.** Paul writes that the Spirit himself bears witness with our Spirit that we are children of God. This is the only time that our Spirit is mentioned in the whole passage, and it's in the most delicate moment. The Spirit works in us as believers so that we testify alongside Him of this glorious truth. That means that the Spirit's ministry of adoption is intended to impact us in the deepest part of our being. **We cry out** having deeply felt and intensely experienced the overwhelming nature of God's adopting grace as we experience the confirmation and assurance of the promises of God given in scripture are internalized and taken as our own. Our relationship with God should affect the deepest, hardest part of our heart.

**This is a call to commune with God as your heavenly Father in the Spirit.** We are like small children who reach up to the Father to simply be held. Our relationship with God is so much deeper than just having the forgiveness of sin, as if that were a small thing. It's as though we stood before the judge, guilty of a capital crime. While we were waiting for our just sentencing, the judge declared us not guilty. Then he invited us into his house permanently. He gives us his name. He spends time with us. Not only that, but he provides for us, and protects us, and disciplines us in love to train us. Then he makes us the sole heir of his entire estate. Oh, how often we would **take for granted the richness of our relationship with God.**

Do not turn the Christian faith into mere law keeping. Obey God's commands revealed in scripture because you are a member of God's house. Learn the deep things of God in scripture because He wants us to know who He is. Pray all of scripture so that you may experience the fullness of joy and the strengthening of your faith in the presence of God in quiet.

**God wants us to enjoy Him.** *Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on Earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:25-26*

*You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Psalm 16:11*

*Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say rejoice. Philippians 4:4.*

**Joy** is the goal of our adoption. Do not submit to the Spirit of Fear. Enjoy God. **Our relationship with God by the Spirit of adoption is living and experiential. He will carry us through until we receive our inheritance.**

## Redemption Yet to Come

*The Spirit's ministry is to ensure that we receive the inheritance which is promised to us in Christ.*

*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.*

We have already discussed the resurrection which is coming. I would rather not repeat myself, but I do want to draw your attention to something important. In Roman culture, one of the chief benefits of adopting someone was to establish an heir. **People were often adopted as adults.** This was particularly common among rulers who wanted to choose their successor.

Christians, having received the Spirit of adoption, are named as **coheirs with Christ.** Our inheritance is fit for an eternal king whose dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Paul's final point is that **we are to look to inheritance as motivation to endure the trial.** We are called to suffer for Christ. We will face anxieties, heartbreaks, and possibly even persecution. We are to suffer with Christ to share in his glorious inheritance.

**Brothers and sisters, the best is yet to come.** We have not yet received our eternal reward. We will rise. God will redeem our bodies. He will complete our salvation and make us better than even what Adam and Eve had in the garden of Eden because we have been adopted into His family, and there will be no more threat or stain of sin.

*Revelation 21:3-5 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." **Our adoption is just a small taste of what is to come.***

**The cross event is like a viewpoint from the top of a mountain.** You can see the earth for miles. You can see towns and cities, rivers running through the valleys, and other peaks in the distance. When we suffer, we need to ascend to the viewpoint of the cross and gaze upon the vastness of the eternal inheritance which waits for those who know and love Jesus as their personal Lord and savior, and are secure in Christ.

**This is the ministry of the Spirit of Adoption: to assure us of the riches that wait for us when our adoption is complete.**

## Application

Hopefully, you can see the ministry of the Spirit at work in your life to bring you these four realities of knowing God. What do we do with these truths practically as we try to navigate life in a **fallen world**?

Firstly, it helps us **manage our expectations**. We live in a fallen world. People are sinners and creation is crying out because it has been corrupted to the core by rebellion. **We should not expect to find heaven on earth.** When the culture turns against Christ, we have an inheritance. When life is overwhelming, we have an inheritance. When the body begins to break down and the mind begins to fade as death approaches, we have an unfading inheritance that only begins with our resurrection from the dead. The brokenness of the world points us to Jesus.

Secondly, **not all will be saved**. There is a great distinction between those who belong to God having the Spirit of Adoption and the world which is passing away. **If you do not turn away from your sin and experience the redemptive work of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, you do not have this hope.** The only thing waiting for you on the other side of death's door is God's just judgment and an eternal hell fire which never ends. This present world is passing away. The pleasures that you cling to which keep you from surrendering to God will come to an end. You simply do not know how many more opportunities the Lord will give you to repent from your sin and follow Jesus. Know this, the more you reject His grace, the less likely you are to ever experience it. Whether we're pretty good people or the vilest criminal, we come to the foot of the cross with the same need: sufficient, transforming grace for the forgiveness of sin and resurrection of the body to an eternal inheritance. Our

only hope is to turn from our sins, believe that Christ died and rose again, and spend the rest of our lives following him in the power of the Spirit of adoption.

Lastly, **to those for whom Father's Day is difficult because of loss or strained relationships, know that the heavenly Father is far better than you could ever imagine.** Lean into your relationship with Him because it's the only one that will last through eternity. Cry out to him for mercy and grace, and know the Father's love, which is without end and without cost. There is sufficient grace for you and hope in the life to come.

## Conclusion

**Our relationship with God is meant to be experienced.** Adoption is the saving work of the Holy Spirit as He applies the redemptive work of Christ by helping us to take off the flesh, put on Christ and experience our relationship with God now and forevermore. **Through the Holy Spirit, we have hope of resurrected life. Through the Holy Spirit, we kill sin, anticipating the life to come. Through the Holy Spirit, we have deep, personal communion with our heavenly Father. Through the Holy Spirit, we will receive an eternal inheritance fit for a king.** Understanding and experiencing our adoption is critical for the Christian life. With these things in mind, hear the word of the Lord.

*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2* Grace and peace to you.