

Sons and Daughters of Abba

Romans 8:14-17

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It is pure privilege and joy to share with you what is certainly one of the most encouraging and wonderful passages in the Bible. I'll read it, explain it, and rejoice in it with you.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of 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, 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." (Romans 8:14–17, ESV)

I was blessed this week to hear from many how helpful last week's message was. Romans 8:13 describes the Christian's posture towards sin. We are to hate it, go to war with it, and seek to kill it. I compared it to how a cancer patient views their cancer cells. They hate them. They do everything they can to rid their body of every cancer cell.

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (Romans 8:14) Here we are introduced to a major doctrine in the Bible—adoption. See, *"For all who are led by the Spirit."* I think at first this sounds fanciful or religiously superstitious except the New Testament speaks of it over and over again. It lands near the beginning of John's gospel: *"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."* (John 1:12)

When we really open our eyes to this truth, it is found all throughout the New Testament and a few places in the Old Testament as well. This is our subject today, but let's get back to verse 14: *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* Being led by the Spirit of God here is not how people often speak of it. It's not guidance in what job to take or being led to marry a person or buy a particular house. "For" connects verse 14 to 13 and in 13 we are told to kill sin by the Holy Spirit. "Led by the Spirit" and "killing sin by the Spirit" are parallels. Those who strive to kill sin by the power of the Holy Spirit are sons of God. So, this isn't mystical leading of God in decision-making. It is the Holy Spirit leading us to live righteously and us striving to do so.

We don't battle sin in order to be sons of God. We care about the moral directions of our lives because it's a family trait. Sons and daughters of the Holy God care about holiness in their lives. It's in our spiritual DNA to do so. Someone who claims to be a Christian but has no regard for pleasing God with the moral and spiritual directions of their life would be a family imposter.

Think of your last family reunion. You know, the freak show. You look around the room and it's weird how many people who share the same DNA walk alike. Talk alike. Look alike. They tilt their head the same way. Their laugh sounds strangely similar. We call it a family resemblance.

All who are led by the Spirit to treat sin like cancer show by this they are actual members of God's family. Religion always urges people to resemble God in order to get into God's

family. Work harder. Do better. Christianity does the opposite. Christianity gives us a new heart that increasingly resembles God. Religion is outside in. Christianity is inside out.

The Holy Spirit – Adoption Agency

"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!'" (Romans 8:15)

I'm going to assume all of us are familiar with human adoption. I'm also going to assume there are some of us who are unfamiliar with God's adoption. So, let's go from what we know to what we may not know.

Human adoption is truly one of the most wonderful expressions of human love. We have many, many adoptive families in our church. We probably have many who were adopted into a family. My family is blessed with two adopted children, my niece and nephew.

Human adoption is an act of love and law whereby a child is received into a family with all the rights and privileges thereof. They are cared for. Provided for. They have a roof over their head. A parent or two. More importantly they are provided with love and belonging. Orphans have lost a place to belong. They have no family within which to identify. Adoption provides for all of this. It is a huge blessing to the child AND a huge blessing to the parents. We have several families who are presently in the adoption process. We should pray for them as it is a grueling and sometimes agonizing wait. But oh, the joy when that child comes into their home! Strike up the band! Break forth in song! Happy day!

Ancient adoption was similar except ancient adoption was less about providing children for parents as it was about providing parents with an heir. A childless family in Roman culture would adopt a son to ensure that their family name and resources would carry on to the next generation. Paul is writing to Rome in the first century and adoption was very present and practiced in that culture.

Realize that adoption is not an *illustration* of spiritual truth. God's adoption *is* the truth. By God's grace and love he places us—sinners—into his family. We are made sons and daughters of the Most High God. Here is our church doctrinal statement on this:

"From the moment of conversion, all believers are forever adopted into God's family. They permanently become His children and are declared heirs with Christ. Their position is not maintained by human works, for it is by God's power and grace that one's salvation is kept sure. Therefore, all genuine Christians can have great confidence that their hope is certain, their faith will persevere, and their future is secure." (Bethel Church Doctrinal Statement)

Romans 8:15 says it memorably, that we were not given *"the spirit of slavery...but...the Spirit of adoption."* See the letters. The "s" of "spirit of slavery" is a little "s." The "S" of "Spirit of adoption" is a capital. Why? Because "Spirit of adoption" is a title for the Holy Spirit. He is the adopting Spirit. The Adopter (John Calvin). By the Holy Spirit we are given family status. He is the adopting agency who places children in the family of God.

"...by whom we cry 'Abba, Father!'" (Romans 8:15) This little phrase may become your favorite in all of Romans. *Abba*. This is the Aramaic version of "Father" in the Greek. Aramaic was the language of the day along with Greek. But this is not the formal word for Father. It is the more personal and family word. In our culture, it would be "Daddy." It is found three times in the New Testament; here and:

- "And he said, 'Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'" (Mark 14:36)
- "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" (Galatians 4:6)

The Galatians passage is very similar to 8:15. This is striking when we realize the Old Testament and Jewish context. The name of God was revered SO much so they would refrain from using his self-disclosed name Yahweh and went with *Jehovah* so as not to misuse the name of God in any way.

Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, "*Our Father who art in heaven.*" Addressing God as Father was unusual, but for Jesus to go to the next level of intimacy with *Abba* was shocking.

Growing up, my dad never allowed us to call him father. We had to refer to him as *Dad* or some version thereof. His dad died when he was four. He grew up without ever being able to say, *Dad*. While he couldn't say it, I think he liked to hear it. I love it when my girls say it, "*Dada! Dada!*"

While I think we must never lose reverence for the name of God, that *Abba* is used here certainly urges us to see this relationship with God through Christ on a far deeper level of personal intimacy than many of us likely do.

I'll never forget hearing my oldest daughter say her first word. I think she said it before Jennifer thinks she said it. But then, I was listening for it. In the midst of jibber jabber, I heard for the first time, "*Dada.*" *There she said it. Her first word and it was me! Me!* "Mama" came later and now I think Mama wishes she heard Mama a little less.

Is it wrong to think that while we feel incredibly privileged to call God *Daddy* that God, like every parent who has ever lived, loves to hear it? *Dada!*

One indication that we are children of God is that we cry out *Abba, Father!* Where do we instinctively turn when we are afraid? We've never had to teach our girls to come to us when they are hurt or afraid. It is their instinct to do so. They also do not run to a stranger, they run to us. Where do you instinctively turn in times of trouble? Whom do you trust? The Spirit creates in us an awareness of a loving, heavenly Father AND compels us to cry out to him. How might including *Abba* in your whole approach to your relationship with God change it?

Please note that it doesn't say we whisper *Abba*, but we *cry* *Abba*. When do we cry out? Happy times. Daddy! Sad times. Daddy. Fearful times. Daddy! Why do we turn to Daddy in the highs and lows? Because Daddy represents presence and strength; at least he should. Not fear, but love and reassurance.

It made me think of this famous picture of President John F. Kennedy with his son playing at his feet (see next page). The most powerful man in the world in the most powerful place in the world and yet his son is welcome to play at his feet.



The God of the universe has so ordered our redemption that the end result for us is we are welcomed into his glorious presence through prayer and he is never too busy with other important matters to hear us cry to him, *Abba!*

Today some of you need to be crying out, *Abba!* You've tried many other things, you've looked around, but you haven't looked up. What about that besetting sin? You've tried in your strength. Is it time to turn to Abba? What about that trial overwhelming you? What about that fear or pain you bottle up inside? How about—by the Spirit—crying, Abba! Out loud. Right now.

The Holy Spirit – Assurance Agency

"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:16-17)

Romans 8 is a chapter about many things, but it certainly unfolds wonderful truths about the Holy Spirit. Here is another: The Holy Spirit testifies, or bears witness to, our spirit. What's "our spirit"? The immaterial, soulish, spiritual part of our being. Our spiritual heart and mind. The place of our internal personality. We all instinctively know there is the us outwardly projected and who we are on the inside. That's the "spirit" here. The Holy Spirit bears witness *with*. ESV translates it as *with*. There's nothing wrong with that translation. But it can also be translated *to*, which I think gives the sense of it more clearly. The Holy Spirit bears witness *to* our spirit that we are children of God.

Part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is assuring us that we are in the family of God. Let me make it clear, we are not in the family of God because we feel assurance that we are. There are some people who never have confidence that they are saved and yet will step into eternity. We are not saved by our feelings of being saved, we are saved by the finished work of Jesus on the cross. We will have much more to say on this later in chapter 8. But see what he says here and praise the Holy Spirit that he works to testify to us.

How? By leading us in moral transformation to kill our sin (v. 13). By creating in us the sense of relationship with God by which we cry Abba! (v. 14) He has many more tools, but all of these are to assure us that we are children of God.

Paul takes it one more wonderful step. Since we are God's children, this means that we must be heirs of God as well. Christian, did you know that you have an inheritance? I'm not talking about whatever your parents are going to leave for you. That inheritance you will either spend, squander, or pass on to your children. You don't get to keep it.

"Paul uses the term [heir] here to denote the full possession of all that sonship means in the new age, but it is not so much ownership as relationship that he has in mind...Since God does not die, there is no question of inheritance in the strict sense of the term. But the heir is in a position of privilege as a result of his place in the family." (Leon Morris)¹

Scripture talks about an eternal inheritance that is ours by virtue of the eternal relationship we have with God as his sons and daughters. See it? Heirs and co-heirs with Christ. Astonishing.

Jesus shares his own inheritance with us. He is a Son in a different way than we are, the eternal son of God, co-equal with the Father. None of us are that. But we are truly children of God because that's how God sees us. He graciously chooses to make us his own. As such, we have all the rights and privileges as sons and daughters of the Most High God.

- *"And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."* (Acts 20:32)
- *"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."* (Galatians 4:7)
- *"This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel."* (Ephesians 3:6)
- *"...So that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."* (Titus 3:7)

These and many others emphasize that our status as children of God will never change and therefore our inheritance as sons and daughters cannot and will never change. He is forever our *Abba*, we are forever his children, God and his glory is forever our inheritance.

Ironically, children who are waiting to be adopted talk about wanting their *forever family*. Foster children know this painfully as they are moved from family to family. Every year or so a new Mommy, a new Daddy. What do they want more than anything? They want a forever family. They want a forever Daddy.

Do you see it here? God offers himself to every spiritual orphan. He will be our forever Daddy. Our forever Abba. Not just a forever Daddy but also a forever family. All the redeemed of God for all of time joined together in one family, the family of God. In this biblical vision, Jesus is both our forever Savior and our forever brother.

So, God the Father is our Abba, Jesus is our brother, and the Holy Spirit is our adopter placing us in this family and reassuring us that we are IN the family.

¹ Leon Morris, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 317.

If I hadn't believed in Jesus yet, after hearing this, I'd sure want to. Makes me wish I could all over again.

Have you seen those videos of kids finding out they are adopted? That moment when they are told, *You're in this family to stay*. Joy. Cheering. Gladness. Tears. This should be our joy today. A forever family with a forever Dad. He is our Abba.

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