

Adopted 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 spirit 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.

Are you sure that you have been saved? Are you confident that you are truly a child of God?

Romans 8 is all about assurance of salvation. It begins with no condemnation and ends with no separation. Assurance is not something that you do. It is not ten steps that you follow that result in warm feelings. Instead, assurance is relational. It brings into focus the realities of what God in Christ has done in the believer.

It is the unique work of the Holy Spirit to affirm and confirm our salvation. The Holy Spirit carries on a ministry of assurance for the Christian. How does He do that in us?

We have already seen in chapter 8 verses 2 and 3 that the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus set us free from sin and death. We saw in verse 4 He enables us to fulfill the law by walking according to the Spirit. Then in verses 5 to 11 we saw that the Spirit indwells us and in doing so changes our nature and the way we think. Last time in verses 12 and 13 we saw that it is by the Spirit we are able to kill sin in our lives--He empowers us for victory over sin. And today in verses 14-17 the Holy Spirit confirms our adoption. It is the work of the Spirit to secure and affirm and confirm our salvation by giving us the assurance that we're children of God, that we're sons of God. We enjoy the ministry of the Spirit in assuring us that we have been adopted by God.

Now verse 15 says that not only have we received adoption, but we've received the Spirit of adoption. What that means is that not only are we adopted, but the Spirit of God confirms that adoption in our hearts. The Spirit of God affirms that to our spirit that we belong to God.

How does the Spirit do this?

1. The Holy Spirit leads us.

Verse 14: **"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"** Aren't you glad that we don't have to stumble around and wonder what we should do or the direction we should take? God has given us the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us. The Greek word translated "led" means "to show the way, or to guide."

How does the Holy Spirit lead us? It is important to note the first word of verse 14: **"For."** In the context, he is not talking about how the Spirit may lead you to marry one person or another or to one career or another. While the Holy Spirit certainly leads us in very specific and personalized ways, first and foremost He leads us away from sin and into the righteousness of Christ. Having the indwelling Spirit changes the trajectory of our entire lives and leads us in such a way that we want to obey the Lord.

Paul is explaining verse 13 and showing how it applies to the matter of assurance. In verses 12-13 Paul explained how we put to death the sinful deeds of the body by the Spirit. So in verse 14 Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit is leading you to put to death the sinful deeds of the body (8:13), it is evidence that you are a child of God.

The indwelling Spirit is never satisfied with the Christian tolerating sin in his life. So the Spirit grieves at persistent sin and will convict, urge, and press the believer to apply the killing power of the word of God to areas of sin. The Spirit will use the word of God to lead us to the cross where we are forgiven and given the righteousness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit always leads in concert with divine revelation in Holy Scripture. In John 14:26, Jesus said, **"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."** The Spirit leads us by reminding us of the words of Christ, by teaching us the word of God.

The Spirit always leads the believer in conformity to Christ. Jesus said in John 15:26, **"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me."**

And the Spirit always leads the believer to live for the glory of Christ. Again Jesus said in John 16:13-14, **"However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you."**

This leading of the Holy Spirit away from sin and toward Christ confirms to us that we are children of God. In Matt. 5:45 after commanding us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, Jesus explains, **"that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."** Sons reflect the character of their father because they share His nature.

So, the first way the Spirit of God confirms to us that we belong to Him is the Spirit's leading us.

2. The Holy Spirit confirms our adoption by God the Father.

Verse 15, **"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"**

As he does so often, in order to teach something positive Paul begins with the negative. **"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear."**

A "spirit of bondage" indicates the contrast between the law as the means to righteousness and the righteousness in Christ applied by the Holy Spirit. As 7:6 explains, **"But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter."** You noticed the language of servitude and bondage. Similarly, in 8:2 the Spirit is shown to be a liberator. **"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death."** As long as one remains under the iron hand of the law as the means to righteousness, he remains a slave to it ending in death. But that is not what you received when you received the Holy Spirit. You received the Spirit of adoption. Slaves need to fear but sons and daughters of the King have freedom.

There are two ways that the New Testament speaks about our becoming sons of God: through the new birth and through adoption. Like justification, adoption refers to a legal transaction that results in a change of status. Leon Morris says, **"It signifies being granted the full rights and privileges of sonship in a family to which one does not belong by nature."**

Adoption had special meaning Roman society. William Barclay explains:

- (i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father.
- (ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them.
- (iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do.
- (iv) He received a new name, taking the title of his new father.

But one thing that the adopting Roman father could not impart, in spite of their great generosity toward those they adopted, was their nature. Adoption changed the child's status but it did not change his character.

Do you realize that what the Roman father could not do, God has done for those in Christ? Not only did the Father (1) choose us before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4-6), (2) accept us and identify us as His very own, (3) give us His name ("sons of God," 8:14), and (4) include us in His inheritance (8:17), but He also gives us His nature. We are born again by the Spirit of God. We have a new nature, a new life. Peter tells us that we have become **"partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."** (2 Pet. 1:4). So real is this change of nature that when we see Jesus Christ **"we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."** (1 John 3:2).

3. The Holy Spirit assures us of intimate relationship with the Father.

Again in verse 15, **"but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"**

Our adoption means we have a new legal status before God, but also we have a new relationship with God as Father. Paul says that the result of our adoption is that by the Spirit we cry out, **"Abba! Father!"**

This term of endearment speaks of an intimate relationship and was used by Jesus when He cried out in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36: **"'Abba, Father,' he said, 'everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"** This is a good model for us in that we approach our "Father God" with confidence and yet we commit to do His will, whatever that might be. I love it when my kids call me "daddy" and God loves it when His children do as well.

In the Old Testament, father was used of God only 14 times and never in a personal sense, it was usually in the sense of God being a Father to the nation.

But Jesus almost always addressed God as Father. This was scandalous to the Jews! They did not understand how He could call God His Father. Yet we find Christ doing so regularly, so much so that the Jews sought to kill Him for doing this, considering it blasphemy (John 5:17-18, etc.). He instructs us to do the same. He taught us to pray, "Our Father."

The Holy Spirit assures us of this intimate relationship with the Father.

4. The Holy Spirit gives us an inner witness of assurance.

Verse 16 says, **"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."**

The Holy Spirit gives inner testimony with our spirit that we are adopted into God's family and at the end of time He will stand with us and testify before God the Father as to our adoption.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22: ***"Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."***

To understand and believe in the gospel requires a supernatural work of God's Spirit in your heart. When you say, both at the point of conversion and many times in the years afterward, "Yes, I do believe in Jesus Christ as my Savior and Lord," that is the inner witness of the Spirit to your spirit that you are God's child.

When you're feeling guilty and condemned because of your sins and you read, **"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Rom. 8:1) and something inside of you exclaims, "Thank God!" where does that inner sense of joy come from? It is the Holy Spirit testifying to your spirit that you are a child of God.

Or, maybe you're feeling all alone and wondering if anyone cares for you or is concerned about your problems and you read that you can cast all your cares on God, because He cares for you (1 Pet. 5:7). As you read that promise, your spirit is buoyed up with renewed hope in the Lord. Where did that hope come from? It is the Spirit of God testifying to your spirit that you are God's child.

I have seen many dear believers as the approach death have such peace and joy even in the pain and suffering of cancer or other terminal diseases. How can they do it? How can they face death without fear? Because the Holy Spirit of God is witnessing to their spirit that they are the children of God.

The Spirit bases His testimony, not upon our performance but upon the certainty of the work of Christ. Jesus Christ has died for you, He has saved you through His bloody death—you belong to Him. You are a child of God! There is no greater security in the world than this consciousness that you are a child of God.

I love the hymn by the Gathers that says,

From the door of an orphanage to the house of the King,
No longer an outcast, a new song I sing;
From rags unto riches, from the weak to the strong,
I'm not worthy to be here, but praise God I belong!

I'm so glad I'm a part of the Family of God,
I've been washed in the fountain, cleansed by His Blood!
Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod,
For I'm part of the family, The Family of God

Are you a child of God? Are you sure that you're a child of God? How can anyone be sure? First, have you abandoned all trust in your own good works and trusted in Christ alone to save you from God's judgment? That is the main source of assurance. But, how can you know if your faith is genuine? Is the Holy Spirit governing your life so that you fight against and kill your sin every day? Is the Holy Spirit confirming to you the wonderful truth that God has adopted you into His family? Part of that confirmation is that you often find yourself crying out to the Father for help and grace in your time of need. And the Spirit repeatedly confirms to you the many promises that God gives to His children.