

**‘THE SPIRIT & ADOPTION:
HE TESTIFIES THAT YOU ARE GOD’S CHILD’
ROMANS 8:14-17**

**ESCAPE 2020 – TALK 3
[Sunday May 24, 2020]**

1. Too Good To Be True

Sometimes we hear things that sound too good to be true. The news is so joyful or exciting or unlikely or unexpected that when you hear it it’s hard to believe. Imagine it’s 1945 and someone announces on the news that the 2nd World War is finally over. Imagine you’ve been having chemotherapy and you go back for the results of your latest test fearing the worst but the doctor tells you that the cancer is completely gone. Imagine it’s your birthday and you’re feeling a bit down in the dumps because there’s nothing planned but then your best friend surprises you with the news that your favourite restaurant is booked and ten of your closest friends are going to have dinner with you there. Or imagine you’re in the middle of a global pandemic and the Federal Government announces they’re going to give your struggling business \$1500 a week for every one of your employees for the next six months, no strings attached. Sometimes we hear things that sound too good to be true, even if they are!

I think that for many of us the Bible’s claim that we are God’s children is one of those things. It seems so unlikely, so wonderful, so strange even that it’s hard to believe. I am God’s child. He is my Father. I have been adopted into his family forever for no other reason than that he loves me. It sounds too good to be true, even if it is. And that’s what we’re thinking about this morning in this third talk. Our adoption into God’s family. But, in particular, we’re thinking about the role the Holy Spirit plays in helping us to believe something that we sometimes find hard to believe.

I have three headings for you today as we reflect just on these four important verses- Romans 8:14-17. Firstly, the truth about adoption. Secondly, the role of the Spirit. And then thirdly and finally, a couple of thoughts about the role these verses see for us.

2. The Truth About Adoption

So, to begin with, let me point out five things Paul tells us in these verses about our adoption into God’s family.

- we are children

Verse 14 makes my first point crystal clear. Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God- or, more literally, the sons of God. And I want you to understand that this is not a metaphor. The Bible does not say that we are like children or that God is like a father. This is not an illustration taken from human fatherhood to help us grasp something about God. No. He’s saying that human fatherhood is a pale reflection of God’s perfect fatherhood. It’s God the father who is the reference point for human fathers, not the other way around. God really is a father. He’s the first father there was. He’s the father. So, we really are his children.

- we are adopted rather than enslaved

Then secondly Paul says that we became children by adoption. In verse 15 he says that we used to be slaves- as we saw yesterday, slaves to sin, and to the desires of the flesh. But now we're God's sons. So this is not like an adoptive process where a child transfers from one family to another. Paul's saying we haven't gone from being a child of one father to being the child of a different father. Instead, we've gone from being a slave to being a son. We've gone, spiritually speaking, from a life without a family into a family. And the life of slavery was filled with fear. But when God adopts someone there is nothing of any great substance that they ever need to fear again. Verse 15.

[Read 8:15]

- we call God "Father"

And it's the last line of that verse that is my third observation here. Because we're children, we call God "Father". Here Paul makes explicit what he's already been saying implicitly. But he chooses the word 'Abba' to underline his point. It's the Aramaic word for "father" and it's the term of address that Mark's gospel tells us Jesus used when he was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane¹. Because we are children of God in a similar way to Jesus the Son of God. And it suggests we can call out to God with the same confidence, and presumption, and intimacy.

- we are heirs of God

And then fourthly and fifthly- verse 17.

[Read 8:17]

If we are children of God then we're in line to receive an inheritance from him. Of course, if his fatherhood was merely a metaphor this couldn't be true. But since we really are children, we really are heirs. Obviously, we don't inherit in the same way we inherit from our earthly parents. We don't wait for God to die and then see what's in his will. Rather, he's already told us what we stand to inherit, and one day he'll welcome us into heaven where we'll share our inheritance with him- forever.

- we are co-heirs with Christ

But, Paul says, we also share this inheritance with Christ. God's Son. We are co-heirs with Jesus. Of course, our relationship with God is not identical to the relationship Jesus has with him. But it's more similar than you might think. We are sons of God like he is a son of God. This is why I think it's important to know that the word translated 'children' in verse 14 is actually 'sons'. And it's why the word 'sonship' in verse 15 is important too. Because we are sons as Jesus is a son. This connection is crucial. As Martin Luther the great reformer once said: 'I am beloved because of the Beloved'². And so we are not only

¹ Mark 14:36

² In his commentary on Galatians 4:6.

children of God because of Jesus, but with Jesus. He is our brother. And we are co-heirs with Christ because we are fellow children in the family.

3. The Role of the Spirit

OK. So what is the role of the Spirit in all this? Well, Paul has some things to say about this here too.

- leading

In verse 14 he describes the role of the Spirit as leading us. He speaks of those who are led by the Spirit. And I think he's talking there primarily about what we saw in the second talk yesterday. He's saying that the Spirit leads us to desire what he desires, that he governs our minds, and helps us to think about pleasing God.

- bringing about

But in verse 15 Paul goes on to say that the Spirit has a role in bringing about our adoption. That's something we would normally associate with the work of Christ. Jesus died for us and rose again that our sins might be removed so we might be welcomed into the family. That's all profoundly true, of course. But Romans 8 teaches us that the Spirit plays a part as well. It's by the Spirit that the fear of our former slavery falls away. It's by the Spirit that the work of Christ is applied to us. It's by the Spirit that our adoption is sealed and we are enabled to cry out "Abba, Father". He is the one who Paul says 'brought about' our adoption.

- testifying

But then in verse 16 Paul adds a third verb to this list. The Spirit not only leads us into new desire, and he not only brings about our adoption so we can call God Father, but he also testifies to the spirit within us that we are the children of God. He doesn't just make us children of God, but he makes us aware that we're children of God. He persuades our minds and speaks to our hearts, teaching us that our adoption into God's family is real.

And how much do we need the Spirit to do this? Because from the outset, the truth of our adoption does seem unlikely, and surprising, and even strange. It can seem to us like it's too good to be true. So we need someone to help us believe what can seem hard to believe. But add to that a few other things as well. We also need someone to combat the work of Satan who constantly seeks to undermine our confidence in God's good fatherhood. And we need someone to reassure us when we feel ashamed before God because of our sin, and we can't imagine how God could possibly still love us, or still welcome our prayers, or still be patient with us even though we've failed him a thousand times before. And we need someone by our side when life is hard and when we don't understand God's purposes, or when God feels far away- we need someone then to remind us of God's proven trustworthiness, of his faultless fatherly faithfulness. And we need someone with us when all the people in the world around us are telling us that we're crazy to put our faith in God, and that the hope we've banked everything on is stupid- we need someone then to speak contrary words to us, and to tell us again that we are heirs of God and that every promise God has made to us is and will be "yes" in Christ. You see, not only does the gospel of adoption seem too good to be true, but we also live in a world

where we're constantly hearing voices outside and inside our heads saying that we'd be mad to believe it.

We need the testimony of the Spirit do we not. We need the Spirit of God speaking to our spirits to assure us that we really are the children of God.

4. Our Role

And that brings me to our role. Let me say two things here as I finish.

- listening

First, if the Spirit's work in us is to testify to us that we are God's children, then we better be listening. We need the Spirit's constant reminders. But we also need to open our ears to hear his message. We mustn't make the mistake of just tuning in to the outside voices which urge us to doubt our adoption. And we mustn't make the mistake of just tuning in to the voices in our own heads which make us uncertain about it either. Of course, these voices are unavoidable at times. But if we only listen to them we'll be discouraged or despairing. We must make sure we're listening above all to the voice of God's Spirit. He uses the word of God, and the people of God to help him get his message across. And we need to recognise the testimony of the Spirit in the words of the Scriptures and in the encouragements of our brothers and sisters. And we need to listen to them.

- crying

But as well as listening to the Spirit's testimony, this paragraph also sees us crying. Crying out to God. Calling him 'Abba. Father'. Paul reminds us here that if we understand our adoption we'll make the most of the privilege of prayer. And if we find ourselves praying, sincerely speaking to God as our Father in Heaven, it can only be because God's Spirit is in us. Sometimes Christians wonder how they can know they have the Holy Spirit in them? Paul's answer here is that if you ever pray to God as Father- then you know. The Spirit is in you.

I had reason the other day to try and reach the CEO of a very large company on his landline. I called the company and asked to speak to him. I was transferred to a couple of different people who all tried to fob me off. Eventually the best I got was an email address for a secretary who assured me if I emailed her she'd pass it on. It wasn't surprising really. He's a busy man. It shouldn't be easy for Joe Public to just call up and be able to speak to him.

But wait a minute, the God of the Universe tells us that if we dial his number he'll answer straight away. He's not too busy for us. Because when we call, we're not just Joe Public who he doesn't really want to speak to. We're his children. And there's nothing he'd rather do than listen to us when we cry out his name. [Pause] That's awesome. And wouldn't we be crazy not to take advantage of that invitation- over, and over, and over again. And we can. Because the Spirit of God has made us his children.

[Read 8:15b-16]