

Introduction:

- A. Illus.: In 2009 we got a rather amazing email from my wife's youngest brother Jon. Six or seven years before, when Jon and Lori were working with a youth group in Nebraska, they met Amanda—a teenage girl the same age as their son Wesley. Amanda came from a terribly abusive home and was eventually taken from her parents by the state. Jon and Lori took her in and loved her. So, after conferring with their two sons, Jon and Lori legally adopted Amanda. She was 22. And her name is now Amanda Foote. She got a **new birth certificate!** Now Jon and Lori have **three legal heirs**, and Amanda has **two new brothers**. She no longer has any **legal claim** upon her former parents—who disowned her—nor they upon her. I asked Jon if anything felt different after that day at the courthouse. Jon said, *“Absolutely! When it was official there was a huge change in Lori and I—sort of like when you see your newborn for the first time. And for Amanda, there was a change in her, too. Now she knew she belonged. She knew we were her parents.”*
- B. That story came to my mind this week because in our series about the Holy Spirit the subject of adoption came up. One of the wonderful privileges of our salvation is that God adopts us as his own children. Turn to **Rom 8:14-17...**

Rom. 8 is one of the Bible's most important passages for understanding what the Holy Spirit does for us. He is mentioned 18 times in the first half of the chapter. Only a few months ago I preached a sermon on the first 13 verses of this passage which I'd love you to read or hear again. You can find it on our website – 10/11/15.

As Paul spells out the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian's life he comes to this: **vv.14-17...**
Let me show you what it means to be adopted as a child of God.

I. GOD WANTS US AS HIS CHILDREN (v.15b)

- A. Every person starts life as a spiritual orphan and in the course of life we each become a spiritual runaway. We are born separated from God by our inborn sinfulness and the sins we commit as we grow up are nothing but us running further and further from God. Sin, after all, is disobeying God's laws and rejecting his love. Though people don't usually think of themselves as orphans and runaways, they are, and it takes a toll. *"Unregenerate souls, like children who have lost their parents, spend the rest of their lives trying to find what they're missing: security, the comforting love of mealtimes and bedtimes, knowing who you are and what your name is. There are no desires more heart-breaking or desperate than the desires of an orphaned soul. Orphaned souls age too quickly and seldom rest easy."*
[Pastoral Graces, pp.107-108]
- B. So it is extraordinary to read here in the middle of v.15, "the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship." There are really two senses in which this is true:
1. One is a legal sense: Like Amanda, God legally adopted us. It wasn't uncommon in Greek culture for a man to legally adopt a young man as a son. He may have liked his character or viewed him as indispensable to the family business. That newly adopted son was free of all he had been before. He had a new name. Any former debts were cancelled. He may be given a greater inheritance than the biological children of the man. For us, the Holy Spirit has brought about that adoption so that we are fully and freely the sons and daughters of God.
 2. In another sense, this adoption is like nothing you've ever heard of. God does something in adopting us that no human parents could do. **God breathes his own Spirit into his adopted children. God breathes his life into us.** We are not only God's children *legally* but *spiritually*. That is, his Holy Spirit is in us. When we have a *genetic* bond with our parents, we may look like them or have other similar traits. But to share God's

spirit means we are now drawn naturally toward God, and to godliness—Christlikeness. We are slowly remodeled around a new inner identity. The Bible says we now have “the mind of Christ.” Do a paternity test—it would have to be a kind of breathalyzer—and you’ll see it on the print-out: we actually are the children of God because God’s Spirit—God’s life-giving breath—is within us

- C. Perhaps you have lived with a deep, deadening sense of unworthiness. Your salvation is God’s answer. God wants you. He didn’t just open a kind of orphanage for poor little kids. God chose you as his son or daughter and gave you his own Spirit so that you will become like him and so that you and he may never be apart.

Illus.: I’ve been visiting with someone who is just beginning to grasp the good news of Jesus. She has asked for salvation and received it, but she’s still putting the pieces together. The other day she asked me, “*When do I have to pay for my sins.*” She feels guilty. I said, “*What happened that day when you asked Jesus to come into your life?*” She thought for awhile. “*He blessed me?*” she said, with a question in her voice. “*What else?*” I said. “*He forgave my sins?*” she said. “*Yes,*” I said, “*So if Jesus forgave your sins, when do you have to pay for them?*” She just looked at me, puzzled. “*Never!*” I said, “*You never have to pay for them—not even the ones you might commit in the future—because Jesus paid for all your sins when he died for you.*”

Look at the beginning of **v.15**, “*The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again.*”

II. WE ARE SAFE FROM THE FEARS OF FAILURE (v.15a)

- A. God expects us as his children to be righteous people, but he has taken the fear out of failure by **forgiving all our sins**—past, present, and future—and by **implanting his Holy Spirit within us so that we naturally want to do right and we can do right**. Again and again the Holy Spirit within us and among us reminds us of this. We often sing, “*No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me.*”

B. Now when we sin we feel guilty—as we should. It is the proper reaction to offending someone we love, and to doing what is wrong. But we do not need to fear that we have forfeited our salvation; that hell awaits us again. Two things happen now. One, the Holy Spirit within us points us toward Jesus. Even when our sin is grievous and long, we have this God-given instinct to turn to Jesus. We may resist, even for a long time, but we cannot evade this sense within, *“I need to arise and go to Jesus!”*

What’s more, because of the Holy Spirit, the guilt in those times comes with this sense, “This is not who I want to be. I hate this feeling. I can’t live like this.” Sin no longer sits well in us.

All that is the Spirit of God within you—pointing you to Christ your Savior and stirring that homesickness of the prodigal.

Listen again to **v.15**, *“The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”* Martin Luther wrote that if we really understand that little phrase, it *“passes all the eloquence of Demosthenes, Cicero and the most eloquent rhetoricians that ever were in the world.”* [F.F.Bruce, p.166]

III. WE CALL OUT TO GOD AS A CHILD CALLS FOR DADDY (v.15c)

A. People of every religion—and no religion—pray, but no one has a right to pray like this but those whom God has adopted as his children. *Abba*, of course, is the Mideastern equivalent of *Daddy, Papa*. It’s not how most people pray. Most serious prayers begin with a kind of reverent bowing. For example, an ancient Jewish prayer begins wisely and beautifully, *“Blessed art thou, O Lord, Shield of Abraham. Thou, O Lord, art mighty forever; thou revivest the dead, thou art powerful to save.”* There is certainly no harm in that prayer! But it is the prayer of one standing at a respectful distance, of someone who doesn’t want to seem presumptuous. It is a prayer heavy with the fear of the Lord.

- B. So this little statement is a surprise. Jesus taught us to begin our prayers, “*Our Father.*” *Abba, Father* has the even greater intimacy of a child calling to her Daddy. **We’re not just being taught to pray, “Abba, Father.”** We’re being told here that because of the Spirit within us **we can’t help but to cry out, “Abba, Father.”** It is as natural to us as it is to a child crying out in the night—*Daddy, I’m scared,* or calling excitedly from the playground—*Daddy, watch me!*, or running to the door at the sound of familiar footsteps: *Daddy’s home!*
- C. **V.16 says,** “*The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.*” The sense is that there are two corroborating witnesses in your heart—the Holy Spirit and your own spirit—both giving the same testimony: *You are God’s child—adopted and loved by your Abba, Father.* No need to stand at a respectful distance from the throne. No need to couch our prayers in high and holy language. No need to fear we’ll bother our Father nor to clean up our act before we come.
- D. To cry, “Abba, Father,” is to touch God’s heart deeply. Can anything be more precious to any loving father than to hear, *Daddy!* If such a cry moves you—and you are sinful—how much more does God welcome our cry, whether in panic or pain, in discovery or gladness. Why would God stir us to such a plaintive child’s cry if he did not love to hear it!

There is one more implication of our adoption: **v.17,** “*Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*”

IV. WE ARE GOD’S HEIRS (V.17)

- A. It is a legal fact of adoption. And what are we heirs to? In a word, glory. We are heirs to God’s glory. To begin with, **we share God’s name.** *Illus.:* Sometimes someone who was trying to place me has said, “*Oh, you’re Lyle’s son!*” For me, that was a great honor. Being God’s heir means hearing, “*Oh, you’re a child of God!*”

It means, too, that **we belong in a great household of privilege**. When I was a kid we sang the little chorus,

“He owns the cattle on a thousand hills,

The wealth in every mine, ...

Wonderful riches more than tongue can tell,

He is my Father so their mine as well.”

I suppose that is true but those are not the riches to write home about! **The privileges of God’s household** are deep and everlasting peace, the joy of salvation and victory, the love of our Father and our brothers and sisters in Christ, and a creation that in due time will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, where—incredibly—we will reign with him!

- B. **V.17** says that because we’re heirs of God we are also *co-heirs with Christ*. In God’s family, Jesus is God’s Son and our Elder Brother. He is supreme above all others, but we are his siblings. We sit at the same table. We share the same privileges. He dotes on us. We are his pride and joy.
- C. **V.17** ends, *“we are co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”* We cannot be God’s beloved children and live in this world without suffering, because this world hates the light, it hates what God stands for, and it hates what righteousness requires. What we share with our Elder Brother Jesus is our obedience to the Father, even under pressure. **The evidence of our paternity is that in suffering—any kind of suffering—we remain faithful to our Father**; that we obey him even when doing right and trusting him runs counter to all the world teaches us. Our kinship with Jesus is not that we suffer the same things that he suffered (that is out of our control), but that we respond in the same way: *“Father, not my will, but yours be done.”*

When we as God’s sons and daughters respond to suffering as our Elder Brother did, we share in the glory of God’s love and life now and forevermore. And we share the hope of **v.18**, *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.”*

Conclusion:

What an inestimable privilege to be the adopted sons and daughters of God, the blood-bought siblings of our Elder Brother Jesus.

Every now and then I tell you the same story, because I return to it so often myself. It is a story for the adopted sons and daughters of God, its truth made certain and precious to us by the Holy Spirit. It was told by Brennan Manning. He writes:

Several years ago, Edward Farrell of Detroit took his two-week vacation to Ireland to celebrate his favorite uncle's eightieth birthday. On the morning of the great day, Ed and his uncle got up before dawn, dressed in silence, and went for a walk along the shores of Lake Killarney. Just as the sun rose, his uncle turned and stared straight at the rising orb. Ed stood beside him for twenty minutes with not a single word exchanged. Then the elderly uncle began to skip along the shoreline, a radiant smile on his face.

After catching up with him, Ed commented, "Uncle Seamus, you look very happy. Do you want to tell my why?"

"Yes, lad," the old man said, tears washing down his face. "You see, the Father is fond of me. Ah, me father is so very fond of me." [*Wisdom of Tenderness*, pp.25-26]