

Spirit of Adoption

By Steven Shepard

Romans 8:14-17 – For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 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.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.

Key truths: Believers are not to be in bondage or live in fear, but are to enter into the freedom and security of their adoption as beloved sons and daughters of God. God wants us to experience our adoption and know that we belong to Him.

Introduction

Adoption is another great doctrine of the faith. We hear much of redemption and justification, but not that much about adoption. The name given for God in the O.T. is Yahweh, the "I AM", the self-existent One. In the N.T. God is referred to as "Father".

Led by the Spirit of God

Believers are in the Spirit (v.9). If you are led by the Spirit you are His child. To be led by the Spirit is not a feeling. It is to have our actions and choices motivated by the influence of the Holy Spirit who indwells us. The Holy Spirit leads us to glorify Christ, to obey Him, to put to death, and increasingly gain the victory over sin in our lives. Those who are so led by the Spirit can be certain that they are children of God. (8:5, 13).

Spirit of bondage leading to fear

The word in Greek for bondage is douleia. It comes from the word deo, to bind, and refers to the condition of being a slave. The Greek word doulos means slave. The NIV reads “you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave.” Our text says that we did not receive the Spirit of bondage again. To what does this bondage or slavery refer?

The spirit of bondage also refers to any system of law keeping as a way to please God. “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear.” To the extent that we are under the law, or any system of works, or our own performance as a way to please God; to this extent we will be in a terrible bondage which will lead to fear. To be under law means to be under the constant heavy burden of measuring up to every single thing that is required of us. Gal 3:10 says, “For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.”

One little failure of God's perfect standard is enough to make us guilty before God and under His righteous judgment. Yet, in our "flesh", in our own strength we will do nothing but fail. In our flesh dwells "no good thing" (Rom 7:18). "The flesh profits nothing (John 6:63)." Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)" When we see our failure we feel condemned. We then try harder, but because we are unable to measure up we fail again and again. We can never do quite enough no matter how hard we try. So we have a constant sense of failing God, a constant sense of condemnation.

Sometimes we place ourselves under our own rules. We strive and strive to measure up to our own self imposed rules. They can be seemingly good things (devotions, prayer, Bible study, fasting, etc.). But if we are doing any of these things with the motivation that we must do them to maintain God's favor – we will always fail and it will produce bondage leading to a sense of condemnation and fear. But God does not want us to live this way. Those who believe in Jesus have not been given a spirit of bondage leading to fear. They have been given a different kind of Spirit, the "Spirit of Adoption". What does it mean to have the Spirit of adoption?

Spirit of Adoption

In Greek the word adoption means "the placing as a son." A natural adoption is the action by which a husband and wife decide to give a place in their family as a son or daughter to a child who is not their natural offspring.

In the Roman world a father would adopt a son for two reasons: to have someone to perpetuate his name and to receive his inheritance. He might already have a son but still adopt to have a more suitable son for his heir. Once adopted into the new family, the son began a completely new life. His relationship to his past life was severed, and his debts were canceled. He had all the same rights and privileges as if he was born into the family. There were always witnesses to the adoption so that the inheritance of the son might not be taken away once the father died.

This is exactly what happens to us. All who believe in Jesus are adopted into God's family. They are forever accepted as His beloved children. God takes permanent ownership over each son and daughter. They are given favored status with all accompanying rights, blessings, and inheritance, and their past debts are cancelled. Let us explore what it means for us to be adopted by God.

1. Adoption means God loves us. He loves us with a steadfast love.

There is something very profound about our relationship with our parents. My experience with my own parents. I felt like if there was something wrong in my life that my parents would definitely make it right. I felt a tremendous sense of acceptance and belonging. I knew that no matter what I did I would never be rejected by them. I remember when my first child was born and how I felt such a great love welling up inside. I remember thinking that this was but a fraction of the great love that God had for me. Having a child of my own helped me to understand the love of God the Father towards me.

Through this figure of adoption God shows us a tiny glimpse of the security and sense of acceptance that we have with Him as our Heavenly Father.

Matt 7:11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Good earthly parents try to provide for, protect, guide, discipline, and confirm their love to their children. God also does all of these things for His children only He does not just try. Because God is perfect and all powerful, He actually does them! God is a heavenly Father who completely identifies with the eternal welfare of His children. God provides for, protects, guides, disciplines, and confirms His love to His children as their Heavenly Father.

John 17:23 I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. 26 And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."

Isaiah 62:5b As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Zephaniah 3:17 says, "The LORD your God is with you, He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, He will quiet you with his love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

Rom 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

"'God is love' is the complete truth about God so far as the Christian is concerned...Knowing this, he is able to apply to himself the promise that all things work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose... Not just some things, but all things! Every single thing that happens to him expresses God's love to him, and comes to him for the furthering of God's purpose for him. Thus, so far as he is concerned, God is love to him – holy, omnipotent love – at every moment and in every event of every day's life. Even when he cannot see the why and the wherefore of God's dealings, he knows that there is love in and behind them, and so he can rejoice always, even when, humanly speaking, things are going wrong." (J.I. Packer)

Does this mean that if God allows Christians to suffer or even to die that He has failed to provide or protect them from danger? Not when we consider what real danger is! Suffering and death is not the real danger. The real danger is sin. The real danger is unbelief. The real danger is dying without Jesus Christ. There is nothing safer or more secure than to die and to be immediately and forever in the presence of God. God promises to preserve us for that day, and He will protect us in this life until our work is done. Many severe trials may in fact come our way; things we don't like; things we don't understand. Yet God has determined that everything that happens to us in this life will be used for our true good, not always what we want, but what we really need.

2. Adoption means that we have a relationship with God that is permanent.

Our sonship is an irrevocable and irreversible contract. Our relationship with our Father is fixed and settled, secure and abiding as members of His family. We will never get "disowned" by our heavenly Father. Which one of us would disown or cast out one of our own children? We may have been tempted to at times. (like Sarah putting her food on the other plate) Our adoption is not a process. It is an established reality. It is one of the steps in God's plan of salvation. Once God takes a step in the salvation of someone, He does not reverse His course; He does not stop until perfection is achieved.

(Election, redemption, calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, preservation, perfection.)

Rom 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

John 6:39 This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day.

Is 54:10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed, says the LORD, who has compassion on you.

John 10:27 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. 28And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

“The depressions, randomnesses and immaturities of broken homes are known to us all. But things are not like that in God’s family. There you have absolute stability and security; the parent is entirely wise and good and the child’s position is permanently assured. The very concept of adoption is itself a proof and guarantee of the preservation of the saints, for only bad fathers throw their children out of the family, even under provocation; and God is not a bad father, but a good one.” (J.I. Packer)

3. Adoption is by God’s choice.

Eph 1:4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

2 Tim 1:9 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.

God chooses to adopt us. In natural adoption the parents make the choice of the child not the children of the parents. It is the same with spiritual adoption. Jesus said, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” (John 15:16) It is common to have a negative view of being adopted as if that would make you a second class son or daughter. Most people become part of a family by natural birth. Some children are not expected when they come along and some are not wanted. But in adoption the child is especially chosen by the parents to be a son or a daughter. None of us could ever make ourselves part of God’s family. We must be adopted. God in fact chose to adopt us in eternity even before we were born.

That God chose to adopt some from all eternity is difficult to understand because of our finite minds. But if God had not chosen us we would never have been saved, because no one in their sin natures ever comes to Christ on their own. God could have chosen to save no one. He would not have been unrighteous to have done so; since no one deserves salvation. God could also have chosen everyone. But He decided to choose some and not others. This does not mean that He causes some to be lost against their will. He simply permits them to do what they want to do, and what they always want to

do is to sin and go their own way. As Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him; and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44)."

4. Adoption is by grace.

Adoption is completely by God's grace alone. How amazing is it that God adopts us into His family, especially when He already had a wonderful and perfect Son of His own. We needed a Father, but God did not need sons. Yet He adopted us. In human adoption most people adopt children because of some desirable and favorable quality. God, however, adopts the undesirable, the wretched, and the filthy.

Ez 16:1 Again the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2"Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations, 3and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: "Your birth and your nativity are from the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. 4As for your nativity, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed in water to cleanse you; you were not rubbed with salt nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. 5No eye pitied you, to do any of these things for you, to have compassion on you; but you were thrown out into the open field, when you yourself were loathed on the day you were born. 6"And when I passed by you and saw you struggling in your own blood, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" Yes, I said to you in your blood, "Live!" 7I made you thrive like a plant in the field; and you grew, matured, and became very beautiful. Your breasts were formed, your hair grew, but you were naked and bare. 8"When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time was the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD. 9"Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. 10I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. 11I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. 12And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. 13Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. You ate pastry of fine flour, honey, and oil. You were exceedingly beautiful, and succeeded to royalty. 14Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you..."

God adopts us when we are completely unworthy. We were children of darkness, under the dominion of Satan, and deserving to be rejected. Ephesians 2 calls us "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath". We were worthy of God's judgment. We were in fact God's own enemies. Which one of us if we wanted to adopt would adopt someone who was his enemy and then make this person His heir? We had no rights to a position in the King's family and no ability to gain the King's favor. We were alone, abandoned, unwanted, and rejected, yet God took us in and gave us a place of honor as His own sons and daughters.

1 John 3:1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

5. God wants us to know our adoption.

Rom 8:15b 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,

Just like earthly parents, God wants His children to know that they are His and that they are loved. This is especially true for a parent who has an adopted child. Earthly parents strive to cause their adopted children to know that they are accepted. The heavenly Father does no less! How does God show us that we are His children? Our text says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." God makes us know our adoption by a two fold witness.

The Holy Spirit witnesses and our spirit also bears witness. This is not just a feeling. We see the marks of our sonship – we believe, we love God, we love our neighbor, and we persevere. The Holy Spirit causes us to see the evidence that His life is in us. We discern that our life and walk can not possibly be attributed to our human natures (which are corrupted), but must be because of His work in us. He causes us to have a greater and greater assurance that we really are His children, that we are forgiven and on our way to heaven. So, as our text says, we cry out Abba, Father. Note that it is a cry. It is not just a theological declaration. It is fervent and personal. We don't necessarily cry out audibly, but we cry within for joy that we are a child of God! Galatians 4:6 says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Note that in Galatians it is the Spirit who cries out and in Romans it is the believer that cries. Both are true! The spirit cries "Abba Father" and we also cry Abba Father. The Spirit cries out in our hearts which makes us cry out – that God is our own Father. Abba is the informal Aramaic term for Father (as a small child would use). It expresses intimacy, tenderness, confidence, and a complete lack of fear. Even though God is infinite and transcendent in holiness, knowledge, and power, yet, because we have been given the spirit of adoption, we call God our own Father.

1 John 3:24 ...And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1 John 3:9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.... 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.

If children then heirs

If we are children we are heirs also. God Himself is our inheritance. We are adopted by the King of the universe and what He has we have. Many of us would leave to our children very little, but God's inheritance to His children is limitless.

Let us live like children of God

If you have not received Jesus, if you have not believed in Him, you are not a child of God. All people are creations of God, but not all are children of God. We do not become the children of God by birth but by rebirth. We can go to church, be baptized, receive the sacraments, and do many outward things of religion and not be a child of God, not be truly saved. John 1:12-13 says, "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His

name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." So believe in Jesus Christ that you may be made a son or a daughter of the eternal God!

Let us live as children of our Heavenly Father. As children of God, we no longer need to fear God's judgment. We have been given the perfect righteousness of Christ. But not only have we been declared not guilty before a Judge, we have been loved by a Heavenly Father. We have been given the "spirit of adoption", whereby we cry 'Abba Father". Let this spirit of adoption become what motivates us in all that we do. Let us live to please our Heavenly Father! Let us stand tall as His sons and daughters. Let us live in the freedom He has given us. Cast off fear. Cast off condemnation. Walk in confidence. Walk in courage. Walk worthy of the family to whom you belong, suffering with Christ, dying to self, not conforming to this world, living a separated life, confessing Him before men. 1 Peter 1:14-16 says it this way, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."

And if we have been adopted into God's family as sons and daughters, we must live as family one with another. Because we are in an eternal covenant with One and the same Heavenly Father; we are also in an eternal covenant also with every single person who is part of the Body of Christ. We have a committed relationship with all true Christians wherever we might find them from every nation, race, and tribe – whether they go to our church or not, and whether they believe exactly as we do or not. If we have been born of the same Spirit, washed in the same blood, and adopted by the same Father, then we belong to one another forever. We therefore should live as family, speaking the truth to one another, forgiving one another, and accepting each other as brothers and sisters no matter what happens. As Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Related Verses

Phil 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life

John 8:38-44 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.

Col 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

Heb 2:14-15 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Rom 8:21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Rom 8:5-9 For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His

John 20:17 Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.""

Rom 8:31-32; 38-39 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Tim 1:7 For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

Gal 5:1 Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.

Ps 16:5a O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup.

Luke 6:36 Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

1 Peter 1:3-4 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

Matt 6:26 Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

Ps 121:7-8 The Lord shall preserve you from all evil; He shall preserve your soul. The Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even forevermore.

Heb 12:5-6 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives."