

The Spirit Confirms Our Adoption

Scripture: Romans 8:14–16

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INTRODUCTION

Romans 8:14-16 says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (vv. 14-16). That passage speaks about our relationship with God. The key word is "adoption": we are "the sons of God" and "the children of God" because we have been adopted. Adoption speaks of love, mercy, and grace. It is a legal action whereby a person is brought into a family in which he has no blood relations. When a person is adopted, he is given all the privileges that the other members of the family possess.

Second Corinthians 6:17-18 says, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." The Lord adopts those who separate themselves from evil and come to Him.

God first extended adoption to the Israelites (Rom. 9:4). Then God extended adoption to all the redeemed of Christ's church, predestining "us unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:5).

Those of us who are saved have received the Spirit of adoption and have been made sons of God. Even though we are unworthy, God has made us His children.

REVIEW

We find the theme of Romans 8 in verse 1: "There is ... no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus." Paul began the chapter with that thought and ended with it as well (v. 34). We will not have to be punished for our sins because Christ has already paid the penalty.

The entire chapter demonstrates our no-condemnation status, which is based on the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a discourse on the believer's security. That's why it ends, "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?... [Nothing] shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord" (vv. 35, 39). The Holy Spirit secures our no-condemnation status by freeing us from sin and death (vv. 2-3), enabling us to fulfill God's law (v. 4), changing our nature (vv. 5-11), and empowering us for victory (vv. 12-13).

LESSON

The Holy Spirit also confirms our adoption, which assures us that we are children of God. He did that by placing us into the family of God through the miracle of regeneration. He transferred us from an alien family into God's family and confirms that reality in our hearts.

Today, many think of those who are adopted as second-class offspring--those added to a family because no one else wanted them. But in the first century, people held a very different view of adoption.

In ancient Roman society, if a father didn't deem any of his own sons worthy of inheriting his name and estate, he would adopt a son for that purpose. He would find someone with the character and talents he wanted in a son. The adopted son would then take precedence over all the man's real

sons. In ancient Roman culture an adopted son was not a waif picked up off the street. Rather, he was chosen by a father to inherit his estate and bear his name.

When the Bible says we have become the adopted sons of God, it doesn't mean God picked us up off the street just to care for us. It does mean He has chosen us to bear His name and inherit His estate. We don't become children of God through a process of natural birth; we become His children because He sovereignly chose us. That's the essence of the biblical concept of adoption.

The Consequences of Adoption

In Roman society, there were four consequences to being adopted.

1. The adopted person lost all ties to his old family

An adopted person gained all the rights of the natural children in his new family. That's a beautiful picture of what happens at salvation.

2. The adopted person became an heir of his new father

The existence of natural-born children did not affect the adopted child's rights. He was a co-heir--and sometimes the sole heir--if that's what the father wanted. The adopted child was considered as real a child as any natural-born children.

3. The adopted person's past was forgotten

When a person was adopted, all his legal debts were cancelled. He was given a new name, as if he had just been born. The same thing happened when you came to Christ: you were adopted into God's family, all your past debts were cancelled, and you became a co-heir of all the Son possesses. All those things happened when we were adopted into God's family. We are legally and eternally the sons of God.

Although the word adoption is beautiful and rich in meaning, it is insufficient to explain all that happens to us when we become Christians. We are not only adopted, but also regenerated (2 Cor. 5:17). Both adoption and regeneration explain how God brings us to Himself. As adopted people, we are named "sons of God" and given title to an inheritance. Regeneration gives us the nature of sons and makes us fit for our inheritance.

We are under no condemnation because we have been adopted into God's family. All our former debts have been cancelled. Since He has made us His children and established our right to be in His presence, no one can condemn us because there is no higher court than God's court.

Romans 8:15 says we have received "the Spirit of adoption." The Holy Spirit confirms in our hearts the reality of our adoption in three ways.

I. WE ARE LED BY THE SPIRIT (v. 14)

"As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

If you can see the Spirit of God leading your life, you can be sure you belong to God because He gives His Spirit only to His children (v. 9). By the Spirit's power you are killing the deeds of the body (v. 13), which also proves you are being led by the Holy Spirit and must therefore be a son of God. Although you won't always obey God as you should, if you sense the Spirit's leading, you are a child of God.

How does the Holy Spirit lead a person? He doesn't lead forcefully; He leads by changing the will. When the Lord redeems people, he doesn't leave them on their own--He promises to lead them.

A. Illumination

The Spirit directs our path by helping us to understand God's Word. Sometimes He may lead us in a specific, practical way but primarily He illuminates the Word of God. As we read, study, and meditate on the Bible, the Spirit opens our hearts and minds to understand it.

1. Genesis 41:38-39--"Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such an one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Forasmuch as God hath shown thee all

this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art." When the Egyptians observed Joseph's wisdom, they acknowledged that the Spirit of God was in him. Today we receive God's wisdom through His Word.

2. Ephesians 1:15-19--Paul said, "After I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, [I] cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe."

3. Ephesians 3:16-19--Paul prayed we would "be strengthened with might by [God's] Spirit ... to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

4. Colossians 1:9--Paul said, "[We] do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The Spirit fills us with the knowledge of God's will, and He does that primarily by illuminating the Bible for us. That's why Colossians 3:16 says we are to "let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly." When we do that, God's Word comes alive to us.

5. 1 Corinthians 2:14--"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The non-Christian cannot understand Scripture on his own--it has to be spiritually defined for him. But those under the teaching ministry of the Spirit are able to discern all things (vv. 13-15). Verse 16 says that such a person has "the mind of Christ."

6. Luke 24:45--Christ opened the disciples' "understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures." Although Christ explained the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit did the illuminating work.

Do You Question Your Salvation?

The primary way the Spirit leads us is by illuminating the Bible. If you question your salvation, ask yourself these questions: Am I understanding God's Word? Is the Spirit teaching me its truths? Am I coming to accurate conclusions about what I learn from the Bible? Is my heart convicted when I read it? Does God's Word give me joy when I read the joyful passages? Does it make me sorrowful when I read the sad passages? Is the Bible a living book to me? If you can say yes to those questions, the Spirit has been illuminating God's Word for you. Anyone can read the Bible, but not everyone can have it illuminated in his heart.

B. Sanctification

Once the Holy Spirit has shown us what God's Word says, He assists us in applying what we've learned. He not only illumines our minds but also stirs our hearts and wills. The Spirit lives within us, speaks to our hearts and minds, convicts us, and produces His fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). The Spirit leads by prompting our hearts to obey God.

The psalmist said, "Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Ps. 119:35). He also said, "Order my steps in thy word, and let not any iniquity have dominion over me" (v. 133). The Spirit of God illuminates the mind and activates the will.

1. Confirmation from the Spirit

Notice that Romans 8:14 is in the present tense: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." When you are not studying God's Word or walking in obedience, you won't receive confirmation of your salvation from the Spirit. When you do not submit to His leading, you will doubt your salvation. That's why the New Testament is filled with exhortations to be obedient and growing in God's Word. If we always responded to the Spirit's illuminating and sanctifying work in our lives, we wouldn't need exhortation. Although we are led by the Spirit, we don't follow Him like we should.

Contrary to popular belief, being led by the Spirit is not a life filled with ecstatic moments. The Spirit's leading is not a sporadic, momentary thing; it's a continuing reality in the life of every believer.

2. Conviction by the Spirit

Without the Spirit's help, you would have many problems. He restrains sin in you--it is through Him that you kill the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13). The Holy Spirit battles with you against sin. He doesn't leave you to fight sin alone, even if you fail to resist it. He convicts you and leads your mind, heart, and will to go in the right direction. When you are tempted to sin, you hear His voice. If you fall, you hear His voice again: "Why did you do that?" He painfully convicts you so you will never want to commit that sin again.

In Galatians 5:16 Paul says, "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." If you follow the path the Spirit leads you on, you won't sin. In verses 17-21 Paul explains, "The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.... If ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, strife, jealousy, wrath, factions, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and the like." Instead, you will produce the fruit of the Spirit (vv. 22-23). Paul concluded, "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (v. 24).

Are You Grieving the Holy Spirit?

It is possible for you to grieve and quench the Holy Spirit's work in your life (Eph. 4:30; 1 Thess. 5:19). It is also possible to insult the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:29). If you do that you will forfeit whatever assurance the Holy Spirit produces in your heart. One aspect of the peace He produces in you is a contented heart that is right with God. If you don't follow the Spirit's leading in your life, you will lose that peace.

II. WE ARE FREED BY THE SPIRIT (v. 15)

"Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

The Spirit affirms we belong to God, which prompts us to cry, "Abba, Father." That's the second way the Spirit affirms our adoption.

A. Fear of God's Punishment

Before you became a Christian you were in bondage to sin. Hebrews 2:15 says, "[Christ came to] deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." Men live under the guilt of sin and fear of judgment. The unredeemed feel a sense of bondage--they don't have the relief that salvation provides. Unsaved people may try to forget or evade their fear, or use man-made religions to cover it up, but by doing those very things they affirm their fear. In the conscience of man, "the law [of God] worketh wrath" (Rom. 4:15).

You didn't become a Christian to receive a spirit of bondage. The Spirit of God wants to confirm your no-condemnation status; He doesn't want you to have an unhealthy fear of punishment, damnation, or losing your salvation. He came into your life to confirm that you belong to God. In fact God's love is "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5). Second Timothy 1:7 says, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." John said, "Perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18). Since God revealed perfect love to us through Christ, there's no need for us to fear.

The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of adoption" (Rom. 8:15), but you will sense His confirming work only when you walk in the Spirit. As soon as you stop following His lead, you will forfeit your sense of assurance.

B. Freedom in God's Presence

The Holy Spirit frees our minds and hearts from any fear of punishment, moving us to cry out, "Abba, Father." The Greek word translated "cry" in Romans 8:15 (*krazo*) means, "to cry loudly with deep

emotion." "Abba" is an Aramaic term that means "Papa" or "Daddy." Its use is appropriate for only one person--your father. It's a personal term reflecting trust, dependence, intimacy, tenderness, and love. Our Lord used it when He spoke to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). The Holy Spirit's presence in our hearts allows us to come before God. We were once sinners living in fear; now we are sons in the beloved care of our heavenly Father. We were once strangers; now we are intimate friends. We can go into the presence of holy God and say, "Papa!" The Holy Spirit gives us a deep sense of intimacy with God. Do you ever share with God the deepest things in your heart? Do you say to Him, "I need to talk to You about this problem"? The Spirit prompts our hearts to come into God's presence. There's no need for us to fear God's wrath because the Holy Spirit gives us the sense of freedom to come to God in intimate fellowship.

III. WE ARE CONFIRMED BY THE SPIRIT (v. 16)

"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God."

In Roman society, an adoption had to be confirmed. According to Roman law, there had to be seven witnesses to an adoption (William Barclay, The Letter to the Romans, [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], p. 111). That's how important adoption was. The reason for so many witnesses was to prevent the natural children in a family from denying the adopted child a share of the inheritance when the father died. When the father died, the witnesses were to come forward and confirm the adopted person's status. Likewise, the Holy Spirit bears testimony that you are a child of God. Someone might say to you, "I don't think you have any right to inherit God's throne! I've seen the way you act; I doubt you're a Christian." Or perhaps you sinned and are doubting your salvation. But remember: the Holy Spirit witnessed your adoption and bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God. That's why Paul said no one can condemn you (Rom. 8:34), including Satan, the great accuser (Rev. 12:10).

Many people claim they're children of God when it isn't true. They don't have the confirmation of the Spirit. If they claim that long enough, they may eventually convince themselves that they are children of God, but they still won't have the Spirit's confirmation. Only those who truly belong to Him will receive that confirmation

CONCLUSION

A. Be Fruitful (2 Peter 1)

Peter tells us God has given us "exceedingly great and precious promises, that ... ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust ... beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love" (vv. 4-7). All that happens when you walk in the Spirit. If you live in the freedom He gives you and hear His voice as He leads you, you will be fruitful (v. 8). But there is a warning for those who don't: "He that lacketh these things is blind and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins" (v. 9).

Assurance of salvation comes from the fruit produced in your life when you walk in the Spirit. He wants to lead you, have you cry, "Abba, Father," and assure you that you are redeemed. But you will experience that only when you let Him illuminate God's Word to you and submit to His prompting to obey the Lord. If you don't, you will become blind and forget that you were saved. Verses 10-11 conclude, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure [to yourself]; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

You cannot enjoy your no-condemnation status unless you are responding to the Spirit's leading and prompting. If you're not walking in obedience to God's will, you will not sense the Spirit's leading. If you are not following His promptings to come to God, you won't feel as if you have access to God--

you will feel like you can't pray. Nor will you sense the affirming testimony of the Holy Spirit when you question your salvation. Only those who walking in the Spirit will have that affirmation.

B. Be Obedient (1 John 3)

John said, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him" (vv. 18-19). How can you know you are a Christian and that you belong to Christ? By being sure that you don't just love in word, but in deed and truth. Then John said, "If our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. And whatever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And by this we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit whom he hath given us" (vv. 20-23).

When you walk in obedience, your heart won't condemn you. It is the Holy Spirit who gives you that assurance (v. 24). He assures you of your no-condemnation status by affirming that you have been adopted as God's child. The Spirit's ministry is constant--it's when we walk away from His leading that we lose the confidence He gives us.

A nineteenth-century Cornish evangelist named Billy Bray was so excited about what God was doing in his life that he just couldn't help praising the Lord. As he walked along the street, he said one foot seemed to say, "Glory!" and the other, "Amen!" When you think about what God has done for us, you too can say glory and amen!

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain what adoption is.
2. Whom does the Lord adopt (2 Cor. 6:17-18)?
3. What role did adoption have in ancient Roman society? What does it mean to become the adopted sons of God?
4. If you can sense the Spirit of God leading your life, what can you be sure of (Rom. 8:14)?
5. What is the first way the Spirit leads us? Explain.
6. What was Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 2:14?
7. After the Holy Spirit has shown us what God's Word says, what does He do?
8. Romans 8:14 is in the present tense. Why is that significant?
9. Why is the New Testament filled with exhortations?
10. Paraphrase the following verse: "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh" (Gal. 5:16). If we walk in the Spirit, what will we produce (vv. 22-23)?
11. What happens when a Christian grieves the Holy Spirit (see p. 9)?
12. What is the second way the Holy Spirit affirms our adoption by God? Explain.
13. What do unsaved people live in fear of? Why shouldn't Christians have that fear?
14. What is significant about being able to say, "Abba, Father" (Rom. 8:15)?
15. Why did Roman law require witnesses when an adoption took place? How does the Holy Spirit's testimony of our adoption comfort us?
16. What are we admonished to do in 2 Peter 1:5-7? What will be the result if we do those things (v. 8)? What will happen if we don't (v. 9)?
17. According to 1 John 3:18-19 how can you know if you are a Christian?

Pondering the Principles

1. There were four consequences to being adopted into a family in Roman society (see p. xx). Those same things happened when you were adopted into the family of God. Read Romans 6:3-8, 16-18, and Ephesians 4:21-24. What former life did you leave when you became saved? What family were

you adopted into (2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 3:26)? What does 1 Peter 1:4 say about your inheritance? According to Psalm 103:12, Isaiah 43:25, and Jeremiah 31:34, what does God do with past sins once they are forgiven? Read Colossians 1:9-13. God has made you fit for His Son's kingdom. Thank Him for your adoption into His family.

2. The Holy Spirit's presence in our hearts allows us to come before God without fear of punishment. We now can have deep fellowship with the Father. Think of several ways that a father cares for his child (e.g., providing guidance and showing love). In the same way God wants to show fatherly care for you. Do you give Him the opportunity to do that? Describe your relationship with the Father. Do you share with Him the deep things of your mind and heart? Do you ask Him for wisdom and comfort in the midst of trials? What can you do to make your relationship with the Father all that it should be? Commit yourself to developing a deeper and more meaningful relationship with your heavenly Father.

3. Are there times when you question your salvation? Read 2 Peter 1:5-10 carefully. Are all the qualities mentioned in verses 5-7 present in your life? According to verse 8, what will happen if you have those qualities? Usually when a person doubts his salvation, it's because he cannot see fruit in his life. Your level of commitment to God will affect how secure you feel in your relationship with Him. Whenever you begin to question your salvation, examine your life to make sure you are being obedient and letting "the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16).

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