

Children of God

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[0 : 00] Well, let me say a few introductory things. First of all, I know some people are here for the first time or haven't been here for the last few weeks. So let me say that what we're doing at the moment is we're listening to Paul's letter to the Romans or it just sometimes gets called Romans.

It's a big letter. You might have gathered that from the reading. It's a foundational letter. So if you want to make a serious attempt to understand Christianity, this is part of what you need to have a look at if you possibly can.

It's not an easy read, as you will have gathered from the reading, but it is dynamite. It is the most explosive document. Well, the most. It is a most explosive document.

It was explosive in the time of Paul, got him into huge trouble. It was one of the documents that affected Augustine, a famous teacher of the church who lived in North Africa.

He lived in a seedy seaside town. I always feel a certain affinity with Augustine. And of course, it affected Martin Luther, whose understanding of Christianity was revolutionized by getting back to what Paul actually said.

[1 : 25] And I think we could say that it affected the way Europe was politically, certainly religiously, but politically and economically. It was this document and the teachings within it, which led to the rise of the West as we now understand it.

And it still affects people today. And you might say, well, what's so explosive about this document? Well, in a nutshell, the thing that it tackles is how to be right with God.

And if you think of it this way, here's a box of people who are marked unrighteous. And here's a box of people who are marked righteous.

And the question is, how do you move from that box to that box? This box is a box where God disapproves.

And indeed, in fact, the Bible would say that the penalty is the death penalty. That's why there is death. The righteous come under the approval of God.

[2 : 31] So how can we move out of God's disapproval into his approval? And Paul was working against the background of the Jewish tradition.

And their answer would be that you rely on ethnicity, so your nationality. That the Jewish people would have relied on rituals like circumcision.

That would have been a very important thing for them. And they would also have relied upon moral effort. And they say, for these reasons, that's how you get into that box.

Because you have the right parentage, the right tradition. You've been through the right rituals. And you've tried hard. And they would have called that the works of the law.

And Paul is very emphatic. And he says, this is not the way it is. Most people would say, well, what's wrong with that? But Paul says, that isn't the way God does it.

[3 : 39] God does it another way. And Paul's answer would be that Jesus Christ is key to this. That he was crucified.

He died, actually. He suffered the death penalty. And Jesus Christ is offered. He comes to us, as it were, with various promises.

That what he did can affect us today. And this can be received simply by faith.

So forget your ethnicity. It doesn't count for anything. Forget the rituals that you may or may not have done. That doesn't count for anything.

Forget the moral effort that you've tried to put in or not. That doesn't count for anything. The only thing that counts is that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

[4 : 41] And I'm putting my entire trust in him. And this is a very radical and, in fact, scandalous proposition.

But that's what Paul says. And if you think it's not scandalous, think Jimmy Savile. And it's saying that if Jimmy Savile or somebody like him were to trust in Jesus Christ, the moral history of his life would be rendered obsolete and redundant because he would be counted righteous by trusting in Jesus Christ.

And have a think about that. And think how radical and mind-boggling that idea is. I'll say no more about that because that's what goes on in the earlier chapters of Romans.

I'll be happy to answer questions about it. But we've got to chapter 8. And chapter 8 is the bit about being children of God. So if you have your Bible there, you'll see in verse 14 it says, as many, no, it says those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

It says it in verse 14. It says in verse 15, you have received the Spirit of sonship. So that's to do with being a son, child of God.

[6 : 06] By him we cry, Abba, Father. Abba is an Aramaic word, sort of a bit like Hebrew, meaning Daddy, Abba, and Father, obviously.

And then in verse 16, he talks about the Spirit testifying that we are God's children. And verse 17 it says, if we are children.

And in verse 19 it says, So I'm simply saying that the text speaks about being children of God, being sons of God, and God being Father.

Have a good look. Does it say daughter? It doesn't actually, does it? It does say children, so that's not gender specific.

But it does say sons, does say children, doesn't say daughter. There is a reason for that, which we might come to. But it speaks about God being Father. So that's what we're going to look at.

[7 : 20] Let me first of all give a little warning. It is a way of speaking about spiritual things. So in another way, another part of the Bible, it says God is like a mother hen who wants to gather her chicks.

It doesn't mean that God has feathers and goes around clucking. It's a way of speaking about God. So if your idea of a father is, father is the person who's grumpy until he's had his tea, that's not saying God is like that.

Your idea of father is a father who forgets everything while watching football on TV. It's not saying God is like that. We have to listen to the way it says, understand God is like a father in ways like this.

For example, it's going to talk about the father as being the source of security. So a good earthly father would be like that. So that's the right idea to have.

It talks about God the father having strength and wisdom and being, as it were, able to look after things. And a good earthly father would be like that.

[8 : 37] Obviously not to an infinite degree, but to some genuine degree. And he says, that's a good way to think of God as our heavenly father.

father. An earthly father ought to have good communication with his children and be accessible to his children. Fathers aren't always as good at this as they could be.

But think along those lines and you'll be thinking rightly of what it means to have God as father. and also the matter of inheritance.

Inheritance is when a father passes on to his children or in particular to the son, which is why son is mentioned rather than daughter.

The idea of inheritance. All the riches of the father, assuming your father ever had any riches, that is, all those riches are passed on by way of inheritance to the firstborn son.

[9 : 41] And that idea is here in the text. Although it's rather strange because in order for that to be true on earth, the father has to die.

But in the Bible, the father does not die, but he still gives an inheritance to his children. So that's just to set us up on the idea of thinking, as we're going to do, about God being our father and us being his children.

Are we okay so far? Yeah, right. So I would like to do this to give you six, as it were, bullet points or six headings.

And I think that these headings would work two ways. They would be good reasons for you either, A, to be a Christian, or B, to not be a Christian.

Shall I try and explain that? I think the things that I'm saying here, or the things that Paul is saying, on the one hand might say, this is great. I want to be this.

[10:50] On the other hand, they are so, well, you'll see what they are, but I think you might say, well, this gives me a very good reason not to be a Christian because I don't believe this and I don't agree with it.

Okay. That's puzzled you sufficiently. I put A and B and then I realize that in the rest of my points, I'd put them the other way around.

But anyway, let's carry on. Show you what the sort of thing I mean. So we're looking at what Paul says in this revolutionary letter about being children of God.

Number one, according to Paul, sonship is not a right, but a privilege. Sonship is not a human right, but it is a privilege.

A human right is something that everybody says, I need, I'm going to have that. And Paul says, it is not a human right, it is a privilege. So you might be saying, I've got a little blue person here objecting, and they're saying, but everybody is a child of God.

[11:51] It's a human right. And I put there, bomb fog. Bomb fog. B-O-M-F-O-G.

Bomb fog. Bomb fog. Brotherhood of man, fatherhood of God. So that's the idea of bomb fog, which says, everybody, we're all one big happy human family.

God is the father of everybody. What could be sweeter and nicer? And I must say, it's a very attractive idea. But it's not what Paul teaches, unfortunately. He's not teaching the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God.

If that were the case, then nobody would need to turn or change or bother because it would be saying everything's fine as it is.

Paul does not say that. Paul does not say that sonship of God is a right that everybody already has. He says it's a privilege.

[13:02] Well, that is what it seems to me, he says, in verse 14. He says, am I right?

It says, he says, those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Verse 14, that is what he says, isn't it? Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

Those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. I don't think he means everybody. Let's try and get a handle on that.

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert at the time of his temptation. You remember that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and it says he was led by the Spirit. Same words.

Now, when Jesus was led by the Spirit, what was it like? Well, he was totally depending on God. He had the deepest possible respect for God.

[14:04] That's how Jesus lived. It was his number one concern to obey and please and honor his Father. That's what Jesus was like when he was led by the Spirit.

And I don't think that you could say that everybody humanly is like that, has those attitudes.

Not everyone is led by the Spirit and therefore not everyone can say God is my Father. How about you? Would you like to say God is your Father?

Would you say actually it is my number one concern to obey the Father? I do depend on God. I know I do. I do respect him deeply.

Well, if you're not able to say that then you're not having the same attitude as Jesus. You're not led by the Spirit and I don't think you could say God is your Father. So this might be a very good reason for you not to be a Christian.

[15:09] You might say I find this very insulting. I find this I'm very affronted by this and here is I've been to church this morning and I've come away more convinced not to be a Christian than I was when I went in and in a way I would say fair enough because this is what the Bible says and maybe it is rather insulting.

On the other hand you might be very grateful. You might say I would love to be a child of God and is this a real thing that people can be led by the Spirit and be children of God.

Does God give this privilege? I would be so grateful to have this privilege. So number one sonship is not a right but a privilege.

Number two sonship is a supernatural gift. I think this is what Paul is saying verse 15 he says you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear but you received the spirit of sonship and by him we cry Abba Father.

We received or you received the spirit of sonship and that's how you became a son of God and you might say I don't like that it sounds rather creepy receiving spirits sounds like a creepy horror thing spirits taking you over don't like it now it is saying that it's supernatural it's not saying that this is

horrific I mean there are spirits that are horrific and unclean and spoil human life but the spirit of God is not a spirit like that so we're not talking about something horrible and nasty just revisiting the supernatural it is saying that to become a child of God is not a product of human skill not a product of human goodness not a product of human spirituality not a product of human effort it's something from God to become a son of God is a supernatural gift and I notice his wording you received the spirit of sonship you received the spirit of sonship if you think of things that you have received you might have received

[18 : 02] Christmas presents you might have received a birthday card you might have received well I can think of things that you've received and he says you received the spirit of God it's different from having something rammed down your throat it's different from having something forced on you God does not force his spirit into people that's what the devil does but God gives his spirit and people receive his spirit it's not forced or imposed so I might now have given you a second reason not to be a Christian you might say well God is don't believe in God God is imaginary God is something made up by weak minded people and so now you've told me that this Christianity business is supernatural I'm even more convinced I don't want to be a Christian and I'm I'm I'm not up for this on the other hand you might be saying does God really give his spirit to people what an amazing thought that the spirit of

God that I can receive the spirit of God and that my life can be filled and energized and touched by God at such a deep level that that could happen that's absolutely amazing I really want to have some of that so it might work both ways mightn't it so that was number two number three sonship is to do with personal prayer so I'm reading on and it says in verse end of verse 15 you receive the spirit of sonship and by him we cry Abba father that's what Paul says we receive the spirit of sonship and by the work of this spirit we call Abba father father and I presume from this he's referring to some sort of instinctive relationship thing whereby a child calls out to parent usually it's mama first isn't it dada mama and you you don't have to send a child to university to get them to that point it comes very early it's very instinctive isn't it so just as a child will cling to the parent the child will call out perhaps at inconvenient times it has to be said mama mama mama or whatever and he's saying that it is possible for a human being so to receive the spirit of

God that we have this instinct of calling to God Abba Abba Father Father so I point out that he's talking about something that is person to person he's not saying that the spirit of God gives us I don't know what I'm trying to say I'm trying to say that this is not impersonal he's not saying that God gives us a spirit of getting up early in the morning or a spirit of making sure that we try hard on things but a spirit of relating personally to God Abba Father that's the point I'm trying to make it's a personal relationship and the translation that says of the spirit by him we cry Abba Father is translating it right it's not by it as a like gravity or electricity a thing but it's all personal and I'll say something about the word for cry the word for cry here is quite a strong word

John the Baptist cried in the wilderness so he sort of shouted out I think the woman that was possessed by an evil spirit went after Paul and his companions and shouted after them these are the servants of the living God or whatever it's sort of a quite a shrieky sort of word shriek is when you when you really shout out mom dad you know I'm stuck I'm stuck in a tree put both my legs down the same leg of my trousers and I'm stuck or whatever children might cry out it's it and you see this is what he's saying by him we cry Abba father it's not cooing I guess there might be another word for cooing I don't know what it is it's not just in the very contented ah dad it's not like that it's it's more you know

I'm stuck in the tree dad we cry Abba father and it seems to me that that is fundamentally what prayer is about it's saying that the child of God is born with an instinct for prayer and therefore lives a life of prayer and if you were thinking of calling out this morning even on your way down father Abba that was a right Christian thing to do by the spirit we call Abba father and then I might have given you then a third reason for not being a Christian you might be saying I find the idea of praying to a deity unacceptable many people would say that many people say I'm not going to humble myself to pray I would as soon do that as and I can't think of a way of finishing that sentence but I might have given you a third reason for saying

[24 : 28] Christianity is not for me if it's to do with praying this is what it is I'm not having that on the other hand you might say this is good news I'm hearing this morning because there's lots of times in life when I need the strength the supply the comfort of a heavenly father and I've heard this morning that one of the most fundamental things about being a Christian is that you cry out Abba father and

it's a right thing to do God hears prayer like that so that was the third thing number four sonship brings spiritual confidence so I'm reading on the text and Paul has said in verse 16 the spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are

God's children that we are God's children the spirit co-testifies with our spirit that we are God's children the sonship brings spiritual confidence so I've drawn a little person here this is not the objecting person but it's an asking person and this person is saying can I really be a child of God is it possible that someone like me you know you might finish that sentence in any way is it possible that someone like me who's just a child just young could I have this sort of spiritual confidence or you might say could it be that someone like me who's ignored Christian faith for so many years could have this spiritual confidence or it might be can I who've messed up in so many ways have this spiritual confidence and the answer to all those questions is yes because the spirit testifies that we are the children of

God and he testifies with our spirit so I'm saying to this little person on the screen the person saying can I be a child of God and so we say well little person do you believe do you put your trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and the person might say well I do and you might say to this person and when you are in deep trouble is it your instinct not to swear and get angry but is it your instinct to cry out to God for help it might not be a very well formed prayer but it's definitely a prayer and the person might say yes it is actually and the person can then say well these are the things the Bible says are Christian and can I therefore be a Christian I believe I can say that I do believe I do pray these things are true of me I am a Christian and the spirit God himself co-testifies he testifies with the spirit of the believer so in a sense he puts a tick and says yes you're right you do believe you are right that is a sign of being a child of

God and yes you do pray and it is real prayer and yes you're right to draw a therefore conclusion and yes you're right to say I am a child of God and the spirit co-testifies with our spirit and we can have spiritual confidence to say we're children of God now it seems to me that one of the greatest gifts a child can have is to know for certain that they are loved not all children have this I'm sorry to say and I don't think it's something that one can easily overcome I know one child who was told you you were not wanted you were not wanted what a terrible thing to say to a child what a terrible thing to say and to grow up working through I wasn't wanted seems to me the greatest gift a child can have is to know for certain that they're loved and this confidence a Christian can have

I am a child of God the spirit himself testifies with our spirit the spirit says to us you are the child of God that seems to me to be a great thing on the other hand I suppose it could be the clinching argument to turn you off Christianity you might say well I've always thought these Christian people were a bit arrogant and now I've heard it in so many words don't mind the sort of Christianity where people are full of doubts and never know quite what they believe but this sort of Christianity that is being explained this morning is arrogant because it has certainty to it and conviction and people can say I am a child of God and that might be the that might be something which confirms you in not wanting to be a

[30 : 14] Christian on the other hand you might say now you put it that way I have to say that that is the if you like right at the root of what helps me live from day to day how fantastic to know that God loves me how amazing to know that I have a father in heaven I couldn't live any other way how could I face life's uncertainties how could I face the way people have treated me if I did not know spiritually that I am a child of God you might say that that was number four number five sonship brings the family experience of suffering in this life now this might be a bit surprising because you think this is not particularly positive but this is what he says in verse 17 he says 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 and then

Paul goes on to say I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us so he does talk about suffering and it's a family experience because of course Jesus suffered Jesus suffered he suffered rejection he suffered misunderstanding he suffered contradiction where people just said to him no you're wrong and he suffered expulsion he was pushed out at the end he was pushed out of life he was executed it doesn't always get as far as that with Christians but that's what Jesus suffered and Paul says if we're part of the family you see we to some degree we can't avoid this we share in his sufferings now Paul at another point says this is actually chapter 5 he says we boast in our sufferings because suffering produces and he gives a list of things perseverance character hope so please notice what he says if we are children

of

God we therefore enter into the family experience of suffering in this life to some degree he does say that the suffering is productive it produces something and he goes on to say that God works all things together for good so he is not saying that in this family you escape suffering he's saying in this family you enter into suffering but it is productive and it leads to something positive and seeing as we had some lads from Lewis this morning I can give you the example of the Lewis martyrs who were to some degree celebrated in the bonfire celebrations of

Lewis on Wikipedia so it must be right 1554 somebody whose name I didn't write down was holding a Bible study on the place that is now the Black Lion Pub in Brighton I can't remember his name and okay right Eric Carver and then 1556 if I read it correctly these 10 people did much the same thing Richard Woodman George Stevens Alexander Harmon William Maynard Thomas Cina Wood Marjorie Morris James Morris Dennis Burgess Anne Ashton Mary Groves and they were put to death they were burned for doing much the same things we're doing now for reading the Bible for praying for believing in Jesus Christ and for not being willing to say no I got it wrong they just stood up for their faith and that's particularly extreme form isn't it but they died for believing they had the family experience of suffering in this life to the fullest extent to the giving up of their lives and that was in

Brighton and that was in Lewis so so this might be the final argument now for you not to be a Christian you might say I'm not up for that I'm not quite sure how one would put that you might say as far as I'm concerned life should not contain suffering there should be no such thing it doesn't exist I'm not quite sure how that would work because it seems a very unreal view of life on the other hand you might say I'm so pleased I've heard something this morning that makes sense of suffering I'm so pleased that there is I found Jesus who himself suffered so I've got an example to follow and from his sufferings enormous good came and I would like to be part of that and I'm hearing the text that

[36 : 19] God works all things together for good for those who love him that God is able to bring good out of suffering and you might say this is good news here is something that will make sense of an aspect of life which otherwise is completely random completely inexplicable well two options there and sixthly and finally sonship contains the promise of future bodily life in glory so what I'm referring to is where it says in verse 17 if we are children then we are heirs so the heir heirs is somebody who inherits so the inheritance is when you receive from your father the riches the property that he passes on to you as son if we are children then we are heirs and he says co-heirs with

Christ so whatever Christ inherits we inherit along with him and in verse 17 it talked about sharing in his sufferings and then sharing in his glory and he's more explicit in verse 23 which Arsema read to us we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons the redemption of our bodies we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons it's a sonship thing and the final installment is the redemption of our bodies the redemption of our bodies so the Christian hope at a funeral is not that we will end up wafting around in heaven the Christian hope is new bodies new physical bodies in a renewed creation that's what he says is the final implication of being children of

God and you might say you might say this is daft daft meaning silly stupid it's impossible physically scientifically impossible you might say it's unthinkable it doesn't even make sense you might say it's ridiculous nobody should seriously think of this well I have to say that's not those aren't new ideas in the times of Jesus the Sadducees the ruling Jewish groups said there is no resurrection and in the time of Paul the very very clever Greeks said it is resurrection new physical bodies after death totally philosophically impossible so it's not new to object to this people have objected to it people have said it's philosophically impossible it's scientifically impossible it's ridiculous it's an insult to people's intelligence but I have to say that

Jesus took no notice of this and just raised from the dead anyway Jesus just went and did it God raised him from the dead and he was seen and there is extremely good evidence that this actually took place so I suppose I haven't actually put this part in but I suppose you might say this is the final evidence the final reason for you not to be a Christian can't accept the resurrection okay on the other hand you might say this is of all the good news things we thought about this morning this has to be either the best or you know tying for a very high place here to think that my life on this earth is not the end of everything that I haven't got to extract every last ounce of pleasure and reward from this life because that's all there is might not amount to much but you're telling me that there is a life

a physical life in the world to come that will make this life pale into insignificance like Paul says I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed if you're telling me that the best is yet to come by far you might say that's a very good reason to be a Christian I'll leave that with you what did we look at we looked at these six things the privilege of sonship the fact it's a supernatural gift the fact that it brings us into a person-to-person relationship of prayer the fact that we have a certain spiritual confidence and certainty the fact that this makes sense of suffering and makes suffering productive and that there's a future resurrection well those are the things that we've looked at as you know and I've sometimes mentioned this before on facebook the internet program there is a little button on an entry called a like button and you can press that if you like what has been said and I wonder whether you this morning would like as it were to press the like button and say this is brilliant stuff this is what I'm all up for this and maybe you wouldn't have pressed the like button before but you're beginning to think actually I would like a bit of that you might like to say to

[42 : 48] God yes please or you might like to remember again as I said right at the beginning that the key to this is not trying harder is not ethnicity is not ritual but it's faith not not not