

The Witness of the Holy Spirit that We are Children of God

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[0 : 01] Well now let's turn back to Romans on chapter 8 and we're going to focus particularly on verse 16 of the chapter.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

Obviously this has to do with the witness of the Holy Spirit to the children of God, to the Christian believer. And although our passage says the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit, we'll look at that in a bit more detail.

But for practical purposes we're entitling it the witness of the Holy Spirit to the Christian believer.

Before we go further into it, I just want to remind you of something simple and easy.

But important, the whole business of witness, of testimony. We have this in terms of a silent witness.

[1 : 25] We have it on the road signs that we are able, most of us anyway are able to see. And we react to the witness.

If it tells you, slow down, you're supposed to do it. If you turn right, turn left, and so on, there is a silent but clear witness. And we are to react to it, we're to respond to it.

Similarly, of course, you have the whole matter of witnesses to an accident or to a criminal offence and so on.

And people are asked to give their witness. And that is there to, in the hope at least, that it will confirm what happened.

And Paul, in this passage, is looking at the witness of the Holy Spirit. Now, this passage in Romans 8, from the beginning, is very much about the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

[2 : 28] The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God, and he's called the Spirit of Christ. And there is, in that sense, no difference. He is the divine spirit, he is the personal spirit, he is the third person of the Godhead.

And his ministry is an important ministry, and it has its importance in different ways. We are told that Christian believers are not living any longer controlled by the sinful nature, but controlled by the Spirit.

They live in the Spirit. That's why they are to walk the whole conduct of life is to be in keeping with what the Spirit teaches in the Word.

Paul goes as far as to say that the ministry of the Spirit is this important, that if we don't have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, then we don't yet belong to Christ.

It's that important. And so, the subject of the Holy Spirit and the indwelling Spirit of God is something important, or should be really important to us.

[3 : 46] And Paul here goes on to show that having the Spirit, we have him as the Spirit of adoption. Verse 15, for you didn't receive the Spirit of bondage again to fear.

Another way of reading that, perfectly legitimate, I think the best sense, is for you did not receive the Spirit, capital, as a Spirit of bondage understood.

You didn't receive him in that way, but you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.

So, he shows us the strategic place of the Spirit of God in the life of the Christian believer. And we're to have, according to the teaching of the Bible, we're to have this childlike consciousness of going on with God because of the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And one important aspect of that is the witness of the Spirit. He shows us that those who are Christ by faith, and by definition children of God as well, ought to know the testimony of the Holy Spirit in

their hearts.

[5 : 15] This testimony is infallible, it is assuring, or maybe we say reassuring, but it is important, and we need to see it as important to the child of God.

And he says, therefore, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. You can see from that that's important.

You can see from that that that's something we want to have, surely. The Spirit himself bears witness. That witness we need to have in our experience.

We ought to want it as something that is God-given. And it's a witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

I want to look at this subject under three headings, really three questions. And first of all, what is the witness of the Spirit?

[6 : 20] And the second is, does a Christian necessarily have this witness? And then lastly, how do we distinguish between this witness and false witness?

First of all then, let's consider, what is this witness? The Spirit himself bears witness. Well, clearly, the first and simple thing to say is, it's something the Holy Spirit himself gives.

It's the witness of the Spirit. The Spirit bears witness. The Spirit brings to bear upon us something that is confirming, that is assuring.

And we will therefore want to look at something that will help us understand what this witness is.

Now, the trouble is, the practical trouble is, that so much has been actually written on this subject that it gets a little bit complicated.

Some say, of course, that the communication, the witness of the Spirit, is something that is personal. It's an assurance to those to whom the Spirit gives it.

[7 : 49] It is like him saying, you are a child of God. And some people take the view that that's what it is. That he personally conveys, if you like, a word in your hearing that you are a child of God.

We don't follow that view. And we don't follow it because we don't think that the evidence is there to suggest that that's what it is.

It's not a personal address. We'll look at that in a moment. It's not like him saying to you in an audible voice, you are a child of God.

Although we acknowledge some interpreters say it is. Others assert that this witness to a person is an inner feeling of peace, which the Spirit gives, which inclines the person to say, I am a child of God.

I have the Spirit. Now the problem with this view of it, and it's a common view too, is that it is entirely subjective.

[8 : 59] It is a person saying, I have a feeling of peace. I am a child of God. Therefore, it's about one's own witness to oneself of what we perceive to be true of us.

But, as I say, we want to rule out these views we've just given, and the latter one is easily ruled out because the reference here is to the Spirit himself, there's witness.

He is the prime mover here. Although it is with the human spirit of the believer, it is the Spirit of God taking the initiative to something that begins with him.

And therefore, it's not about I have a feeling of inner peace. Therefore, I have the Spirit as the witness. It is what he brings to bear upon the human spirit.

That's clear from the passage. It's not down to a personal inclination, which may or may not be based on reliable feelings.

[10 : 11] The feelings may not be reliable at all. And if you think about it yourself, one thing about us is that all of us were subject to mood swings.

For one reason or another, there are some folks smiling, some of the most honest. You know what I mean. We're subject to mood swings.

Our moods are so lacking in reliable witness. They're not static. We're up or down, or we're simply topsy-turbo.

Our own feelings are not reliable. Certain seasons, we feel great in our Christian experience.

We feel that there's no doubt but that I am a child of God. At other times, in dark moods, we doubt that we're Christians at all.

[11 : 15] There's nothing to prove to us that we're really believers going on with the Lord. We're never going to resolve this question, what is the witness of the Spirit, with that approach.

We must look elsewhere for an explanation. Before we do that, I just want to deal with the first point I made about this idea that it's a direct word from the Spirit to the mind of the believer.

You are a child of God. It seems to me that the Bible allows us to reject that view of things because this is not the way the Spirit of God operates.

He doesn't simply direct. In the times of revelation, when the Bible was being put together, the Spirit of God did work like that.

There's no two ways about it. What's in my own mind here just now is the example of Philip, the evangelist, when the Spirit of God told him to go alongside the chariot.

[12:30] Do you remember on the way to Azotus? He went alongside the chariot of this man who turned out to be the Chancellor of Exchequer for the Queen of what we call Ethiopia.

And he was reading the scroll of Isaiah the prophet. And Philip went alongside him and answered his questions. Now there was a direct word from the Spirit to the evangelist.

And in the period when the Scriptures, the Bible, had been put together, these things were happening. But that's not the way the Spirit operates in these days.

And to adhere to this inner voice or this direct voice theory, as some do, simply undermines the purpose of the Spirit of God in giving us the Bible in the first place.

Again and again, the emphasis is on the Word of God directing us. And the Spirit himself has chosen to let the Bible be our chart and compass, if you like, our highway code.

[13:42] It is the only rule of faith and life, we remind ourselves. And so, it seems to me that we are left with only one way forward in answering the question, what is the witness of the Spirit?

And it is that he applies the truth of Scripture to the believer. He takes the truth as it is in Jesus and uses it powerfully.

And there is a power dimension here. He powerfully applies it to us. He confirms to us the truth in Jesus and that allows us to say, as a believer, therefore, I have a right to say I am a child of God. It's on the basis of the Spirit in the Word coming to us in power. And you see, the Spirit of God seals the truth to our hearts.

That us believing in Christ entitles us to all the promises of God in his Word that are in Christ Jesus.

[14:57] And through these he generates this assurance to us. He confirms with our spirit and to our spirit. That we are children of God.

Remember in 1 John 3, verse 1, you have the words, Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, has given in to us, that we should be called the children of God, and we are. And it is this, and we are. We have the word sealed to us by the Spirit. And we are entitled thereby to take him at his word.

And to have the witness with our spirit. Because it is to our spirit, from the Spirit of God. Well, I know more could be said about it, but that is enough, I think, to remind us that the Spirit works through the Word.

And he confirms the Word to us. Maybe he allows us to discover it in a reading, in the Word preached. Or maybe he brings back to our memory something we heard before.

[16:16] And it just comes home to us in power. And suddenly we realize that he is bearing witness to the truth in such a way that we are able to be assured by him that we are children of God.

I want to push on a wee bit further now and ask the question, does a Christian necessarily have this witness?

Does a Christian necessarily have this witness? Well, clearly the New Testament church, the apostolic church, gives us evidence that many had this assurance.

Paul himself wrote about it in a very personal way. He wrote about it as his own experience. But as we have said, the apostles were living, if you like, on the crest of a wave.

They were living in a grey tide of the Spirit's work. They were still living when Scripture was being brought towards its completeness.

[17:30] And so their experiences were extraordinary. There were many others who had this knowledge.

They had this witness of the Spirit. Many in the New Testament church had this. The boldness they had to proclaim Jesus on every hand indicated that they knew the witness of the Spirit in themselves.

But even in those days of the apostolic church, it doesn't follow from what I've said, that every follower, every believer in Jesus had this witness that we are the children of God. Much has been written on this over the centuries. And one of the things that is certainly true, and some have made this assertion on the basis of the Bible, and that is that assurance itself, the assurance that enables us to say, I have the witness of the Spirit in me that I am a child of God. That that way of thinking, and thinking about assurance, assurance is not in itself an essential ingredient in saving faith.

[18 : 56] We can be in the faith, we can be followers of Jesus, and lack this assurance, unable to say with a definiteness, I am a child of God.

I have the witness of the Spirit. He has witnessed with my Spirit to this end. And that's not shimmying around the problem, it's simply recognizing that as to saving faith, we may not in ourselves have this assuredness that comes through the witness of the Holy Spirit. And that's because it is not essential unto salvation. We may live out our days struggling with the whole question of assurance.

And we may even come to our deathbed without that assurance. We may have it before we leave this world. We may not have it before we leave this world.

And therefore, the emphasis must fall on what believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is, and what living by the Spirit is, rather than going frantic about gaining assurance.

[20 : 23] I remember years ago being acquainted with a chap who was going into the Pentecostal ministry, the Elam Pentecostals of Wales.

And he, in his church, they were very focused on what we call the second blessing, which was an experience of the Holy Spirit post-conversion, after conversion.

In other words, you believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and then at some point, through earnestly seeking it, you gained this baptism of the Spirit, a second blessing, as they called it.

And some folk were frantic. They never had this in the Pentecostal ministry. And this chap was going into their ministry, and he hadn't got this experience, and it drove him nuts, that he hadn't got it, because he became frantic.

Well, this is the evidence that I really am a follower. My dear friends, that's simply wrong. That's not biblical teaching. Not every Christian can say, I have this witness which enables me to say, I am a child of God.

[21 : 43] And if you think about it, when the good news in Jesus was preached, people were not asked, be born again, and you'll be saved.

So it's true, we must be born again to be saved. But they were never commanded to be born again, because we can't affect that new life in ourselves.

It's God's work. We're never told, be assured of your faith and be saved. Either. Because if it was essential to salvation, we would have to be assured of our faith.

Agreed? Scripture never teaches that. Scripture never teaches, be assured of your faith and you'll be a saved person.

It teaches rather, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, close in with him in his wonderful work as our prophet, priest and king.

[22 : 54] As the one who, as priest, laid down the only sufficient offering, the only lamb that could deal with our sin and bring us to God himself.

and we are told, not be born again and you'll be saved. Not be assured of your faith in Jesus and you'll be saved, but believe on him.

With all your heart, receive him. My dear friends, the truth is, there are many who have entered into glory when they died, who did so without the witness we're referring to here.

And there are Christians today who do not have this witness. At least, maybe it's better to say they don't have it yet. They may have it in God's goodness before they leave this world.

But they are nonetheless indwelt by that spirit. And those of us who have ministered the word among God's people have seen it again and again, particularly in our Scottish Highland and Island tradition.

[24 : 13] I am trying to think we're perhaps just a wee bit lopsided in the way we've emphasised or not emphasised the helpfulness of knowing. The helpfulness of having this assurance of the witness of the spirit.

That said, we've seen many a godly person who clearly loved the Lord Jesus Christ, understood why they were believing on him and following him, and yet who didn't have that assurance of the faith, who could not say by the spirit in the word, I am a child of God. they are nonetheless indwelt by him, and they will at last be with him as many who have gone already.

And as I say, where there's life, there's the hope that we might have that witness, that we may know and be able to say the spirit bearing witness with our spirit and to us, that we are children of God. I think it's fair to say, and I know the risk attaching to it, saying you must seek it, because that is the error of those who teach the second blessing and the baptism of the spirit as a unique post-conversion experience.

[25 : 43] You must seek it, the sky is in my mind, I better not give a name, but the poor guy was distracted that there he was preparing for the Pentecostal ministry and he never had this experience.

So, and when I say we must seek the assurance, I'm saying it in a, I hope and trust, a biblical emphasis way, that it is something the Lord can give us that will do us good and therefore that we should humbly and patiently seek.

And we ought to notice therefore the place of the spirit speaking to us in the word, confirming our interest in Christ. One last thing, this will have to be a short point.

How may we distinguish the witness of the spirit from a false witness? It is utterly a biblical thing to ask that question.

Not Paul, but John, the apostle, in 1 John 4, the beginning of the chapter says, Beloved, talking to Christians, don't believe every spirit, but test the spirits.

[27 : 07] to see whether they are of God because there are many false prophets gone out into the world. And what we are going to boil that down to is this.

Listen to what the spirit says in the word. The Holy Spirit of God says in the word, Beloved, don't believe every spirit. There are many lying spirits, and there lying spirits in the mouth of those who profess to be experts in religion and even Christian preachers.

We must test what these spirits are teaching in relation to the Bible's teaching. That's the way that we will gain a clear understanding of what is true.

And I would begin looking at the false spirit by simply saying, does that spirit bring you closer to the word of God?

Does that spirit make you see that the word of God is an infallible and complete record? Or is that spirit shifting your thinking away from the view that the Bible is the inerrant word of God?

[28 : 25] The scriptures of the Old and New Testament. I heard somebody recently, you must watch what I'm saying, I heard somebody recently in prayer saying, we were taught and we believe that the Bible is the word of God.

And I thought, uh-uh, that is not enough. We were taught it and we believe it because it's true. Jesus himself put his seal of approval on the view that the Hebrew scriptures from Genesis to Malachi constituted the then word of God.

What Jesus went on to do and teach having given his apostles the authority to compile the gospel record went on to teach through the apostles and the letters the whole counsel of God.

And we are not simply superficially deciding to believe this is the word of God. It is the spirit of God who confirms the word of God to us who is the author of that word.

[29 : 46] And the question is does that spirit whether it is in the mouth of a preacher bring us to deeper convictions about the authority and trustworthiness of the Bible or does that person shake your faith in the Bible?

Similarly the false spirit reduces Jesus from being eternal son of God who became man to something at best in between or something as a J.

W. have it that's like the archangel who assumed a temporary form and so on. Does the spirit that is ultimately false take us away from the Bible's teaching the robust teaching that he is the eternal son of God who became man and who laid his life down an offering for sin and he took it again in order that we might have a perfect right standing with God through faith in him.

The lying spirit takes us away from these things weakens our hold. On the other hand the spirit of God speaks like this to us.

I'm going to use 1 John seeing as how I was in it a moment ago. 1 John 1 3 14 We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren.

[31 : 36] we love those who love Christ. 1 John is full of we know.

We know that we have come to know him because we obey his commandments.

This is the love of God that we keep his commandments. 1 John 3 22 1 John 5 3 We find his commandments not burdensome to us.

This is how we know we love him. We love his people. We love people. We not see people in need and walk on by.

we walk according to his word. His commandments matter. We are not to disregard the commandments of the Lord, but they are precious to us and we've come to know him because we love his commandments.

[33 : 00] Now it's true and we need to say it. It's true that we're not saved and adopted into the family of God because we've earned the right through keeping his commandments.

No, no. We're saved by the grace of God through the Lord Jesus Christ and we love his law because we've been saved freely by his grace and we want to walk in that law.

It's like he's handing us I've saved you. I've saved you by dying in your room instead. I've given you new life. I've taken my life that you may have life that shall never end.

And now I'm handing you my book. Walk in that way. That's the way it is. And I'm afraid that there's so much going on in the church today generally speaking that indicates that people who are teaching are not teaching this way.

They're not teaching that the commandments of the Lord have to be walked in and applied stealing this blasphemy everybody's at it.

[34 : 22] Sexual immorality everybody's at it. insincerity. False witness. It's the way things are today. Is that what the Christian is about?

No. We shall assure our hearts by walking in the word that the Spirit has given us. Jesus himself said and with this we finish.

Time has beaten us again. Jesus himself said if you really do love me you will really keep my commandments.

And the Spirit of God confirms these things to us and flags up to us that the false spirit takes us away from these things.

So let's be content not to look for some super mystical experience but to recognize that the true secret of the Lord is with those who fear him.

[35 : 32] With that reverence that carefulness that makes them walk in his ways. And true fear of the Lord my dear friends is born out of love for him.

The Spirit himself and may he do it for us. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit and to our spirit that we are children of God.

Amen.