

The Spirit of Adoption

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[0 : 00] Well, let's just bow our heads in prayer. O Lord, our God, you instruct us in your word to pray for all classes of people, for those that are in authority.

And we pray today, O Lord, for our Queen and our royal household, for those in government, the Prime Minister and his cabinet, and all those who are exercising themselves in matters political.

And we know that although things are moving towards the general election, there are responsibilities still on those who have to act, and act decisively.

And we pray that wisdom and understanding may be given. Indeed, we pray too, O Lord, for this whole business of the manifestos that are coming forth from the political parties and our own interaction with them.

And we pray, O Lord, that it may please you to steer us as a people to clarity and understanding, and that those who are in authority may not promise more than they can do, but be wise and sensitive.

[1 : 32] We need you, O Lord, to come and help us. It is apparent, not only in our land, but in other nations too, that people have lived beyond their means.

And now there are great struggles. And we pray, O Lord, that as the leaders of the nations come under pressure to do better than they've done, above all things we pray, that they may get true wisdom.

We remember how the psalm writer says, Now kings, be wise, be taught. You judges of theirs, serve God in fear, and join with reverent song.

O Lord, we pray that the leaders in the nations may learn your ways. And although it doesn't seem possible, we know that with you, what is impossible to man is gloriously possible.

May it please you that your kingdom will come in this way. And we remember too today, O Lord, the work of the gospel in our beloved land. The signs are everywhere that people are going further and further from the things of eternity and of real lasting worth.

[3 : 02] And the Christ things are being mocked and derided. And we pray, O Lord, our God, that you would remember those who have been brought up in these ways, who have been nurtured in the bosom of the church, and who know so much, that you would not leave them to go further and further away, but that you would lovingly and graciously touch their lives and draw them to yourself.

We pray for others. There are many who are so ignorant of the Bible's teaching. And we just pray, O Lord, for opportunities, effective opportunities, in which our testimony may be listened to, and that people may come to faith.

And in this connection, we pray, O Lord, that you will clarify our own understanding. Those who are unsure, be near to them today, here in this place, as well as in other congregations, that they may have that clarity from you, that they may know whom it is they have believed, or they may be believing.

Whatever it is, O Lord, be gracious, be working in your own sovereign grace. We remember, too, again, O Lord, those who struggle in their health, whether it is with depression, or mental illness of some sort, or simply the physical afflictions that trouble and weaken mankind.

We pray that you will encourage them today. Lift them up. And remember, too, those who are aged among us, that you will give them strength equal to their days, and that they may be able to say that you remember them, even in old age when others fade, and grant that they may be bringing forth fruit to the glory of your name.

[5 : 13] We commit our friends who are away to you today, each in their own particular lot and the commitments they have. Remember them for good, and may it be that even this day they are taking time to remember us here.

Be with us then, and bless the word to us now, in Jesus' precious name. Amen. Well, we're going to turn back to the Romans passage, Romans 8.

And we want to focus our attention on verses 14 and 15 of Romans 8, where Paul says, For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you receive the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.

Maybe we can just adjust verse 15 to give a little clarity. This is a legitimate way, by the way, of translating it. For you did not receive the spirit as a spirit of bondage.

[6 : 38] That is the Holy Spirit, going back to verse 14. You did not receive the spirit as a spirit of bondage, again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, Abba, Father.

And so our subject is really the spirit of adoption and the Christian believer. Now, one way or another, we're familiar, to an extent anyway, with the whole business of the remit of adoption agencies.

These folks that are appointed to deal with the placing of children in this or that family as a child of the family, adopted into the family.

And we know ourselves, and some will know it more than others, of course, but we know ourselves that adoption agencies are bound to apply certain criteria that have been kosher, that have been settled in law so that there's cover, there's protection both towards those adopting and those who are being adopted.

And there is a certain sensibleness in applying this, in having the criteria in the first place and applying it so that there is an all-round concern and care for the well-being of children who are adopted into families.

[8 : 16] So, it's something that is not known to us, this concept, this reality too, of a child being adopted into the family and being made part, a real part, of that family.

family. And so, when we come to the Bible's teaching, the whole arrangement differs in this way, that God doesn't need anyone, he doesn't need an adoption agency, for example, to give him the criteria to determine whom he will adopt, nor other, he sovereignly, unconditionally, chooses people to himself to be partakers of the family blessings and inheritance.

I nearly said he does this unilaterally, and there's a sense in which that's true. He simply acts. The criteria are his own, but the one that we're concerned with is that he sovereignly, he unconditionally chooses an innumerable multitude from everlasting to inherit all the blessings of fellowship with him and the inheritance that he has laid up for those who in time come to know him and love him.

And this, you find the apostles referring to here and there. When we were studying 1 Peter, you had the same thing, that he lovingly foreknew them and chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world.

And then in 1 Peter chapter 1, he goes on to explain something of the wonderful inheritance that's theirs. It's incorruptible, it's undefiled, it's unfading, and so on.

[10 : 11] And he brings them into that so that they are really and truly part of his very own family. We read both in the Galatian passage and here in this passage in Romans that they are joint heirs with Christ himself.

And so we want to just think over this whole wonderful teaching on the spirit of adoption and the Christian believer and to look at how it applies to us and to look at what can, as it were, spoil our understanding of this.

It's easy to say the spirit of God works in those who are adopted into the family. He works in their hearts. It's easy enough to say that he brings us from one state of spiritual deadness into spiritual life.

But when we say that and more than that, there are complications at a practical level for us. How do we really know we've been adopted?

Should we know we've been adopted? Well, first of all, we can know we've been adopted into the family and we should know we are adopted.

[11 : 35] Just imagine in the ordinary state of things how ridiculous it would be that the child is in a way and I know of course that some children this is kept from until a certain age and then they're told.

But there is a legitimacy in actually having documentation that this has happened, that someone has come from there to there, out of that situation into this family.

And as far as God is concerned, there is something right about us knowing. There is something right about being sure that we have been adopted into the family of God.

And Paul in dealing with this, he looks at some practical pointers. For example, verse 13 says, If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die.

But if by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. And then he says, For as many as are led by the spirit of God, these are the sons of God.

[12 : 48] Now, to clarify that, he takes a negative, for you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear. So what I want to look at first of all is a complicating factor, the spirit of bondage.

And to take our first point in terms of, Christian does not receive a spirit of bondage, or a servile spirit.

We've already noticed, but I'll repeat it, the contrast in this passage in Romans 8 is between living by the Holy Spirit, his power, his energy in us, his grace in us, and be led by him, over against living in our natural strength and giving ourselves over to our natural appetites.

And what he's showing here is that those who receive Christ by faith, they do so by the work of the spirit. If they are in Christ, they're in the spirit.

We read a little bit earlier on in that passage that if we have not the spirit of Christ, we don't belong to Christ. And to have the spirit of Christ is to have come to faith in Christ.

[14 : 16] And so Paul is emphasizing here how those who live by faith in Christ live because of the work of the spirit in them. And here is how Paul deals with this complicating factor of a fear, an uncertainty, an unease about ourselves.

The spirit comes not to generate an attitude to the law which binds the heart to slavishly trying to keep it.

The spirit doesn't work in that way. He doesn't give us an attitude to the law that we've got to be striving, striving, trembling, lest we come short.

Now there are many, and doubtless there are some here today who there are many in the church who think like this.

Maybe they've got a sensitive conscience, maybe they've understood in a slightly off-beam way the place of the law of God, and they are anxious over their soul, and they're struggling all the way along life's path with the dread that they keep on coming short.

[15 : 38] And judgment day is getting nearer and nearer as they get older and older. There are people like that in the churches, especially where the gospel is preached, is expounded again and again.

to quote the writer to the Hebrews, they're all their lifetime subject to bondage because they're afraid, they fear.

They've got this servile spirit, this sense of dread. And often enough, people in that position genuinely don't know whether they are spiritually minded or not.

Because they know the doctrines of the faith. But they don't know that they're in the faith. They know the doctrines and to a greater extent believe the doctrines.

I was thinking at the beginning of the service there where we were singing Psalm 145. I suppose most of you here today, in fact, probably all of us learned the Psalms, symmetrical Psalms, in school or in Sunday school.

[16 : 58] Many of them were taught off by heart. As we started to sing Psalm 145, second version, I suddenly remembered, I knew that Psalm off by heart.

When I was a wee boy, long before I knew what it was to really praise the Lord and to give thanks for his salvation, I was taught it and I knew it off by heart, from start to finish.

And you'll be like that too, no doubt. We've been so steeped in the doctrines of the Bible and of the Gospel, the good news in Jesus, and to a real extent we believe these doctrines and we can easily detect when somebody's gone off into unsound doctrine.

and there are people among us and there are people in our churches who are in this state of fear, a state of bondage, a spirit of bondage, an oppressive spirit, anxious as to where they are.

Because if you're like this you'll know you have some appreciation of the truth, it's not just that you know it in your head but you have a certain apprehension of it, you understand it, you feel something of the power of it.

[18 : 33] And Paul deals with this problem area in relation to adoption and he says we haven't received a spirit of bondage again to fear.

There's a hiatus here, there's a blockage here that has to be cleared away. And of course what complicates the thing still further for us is that we may be regular and faithful attenders upon the means of grace.

we're not interested in the world's way and going the world's way but still in all we're living in fear and dread because we feel we've come short in keeping the law of God.

We're pressing on and we're striving to keep the law of God to be good Sabbath keepers, to be good neighbors in the hope that some of God will accept our efforts and yet deep down we have this fear that is bondage to our minds and hearts.

We have this fear, this sense that whenever we've achieved something we've aimed for in terms of living out the word of God, we come short, we fall down.

[20 : 07] we can't do it. And you remember when we read in Galatians 3, we read it deliberately because Paul is discussing there the function of the law.

And the function of the law of God is not like a stairway to heaven that this step takes you up to the next step to the next step to the next. It's not like that.

That's bondage. If we imagine that by striving to ascend the ladder of the law, we're going to get to heaven, we're wrong. To me, it's like, I'm no marathon runner I have to tell you, but I admire those who train for marathons and run them.

even if they do them on the Lord's day for good causes, they do them. But to me, it's like joining up with a marathon runner and you've made a bit of preparation, you've tried to do your bit, and then you're getting along quite nicely, and all of a sudden the world-beating marathon runner just goes away and he's out of sight before you know it.

The law is like that. Just when you think you're managing to do better, to move forward, the law suddenly shows you how far short you've come.

[21 : 38] And that whole approach is bondage. It's like trying to ascend the ladder by the law. Thomas Chalmers, the great free church man of the 19th century, in his commentary has what to me as a ghastly illustration, but it's a good illustration.

It's ghastly because I have a fear of heights. And he takes the case of a mountaineer who is on a really difficult, steep mountain and he's getting towards the peak and he's got to scale one of these difficult overhands that takes you back on that huge drop.

and he says he's climbing and he gets to this most difficult overhang and at great personal cost he manages to get over that overhang and up into the next stage and suddenly he sees that the peak, although it's not too far away, has some impossible difficulties between where he is and where he wants to be at the top.

And the law is like that. When we try to use the law of God, the good and holy and perfect law of God as a means of gaining the top, the summit, the peak, heaven itself, the law will show us just when we think we're getting there, impossible.

The spirit of bondage, when we use the law in that way, it is like a spirit of bondage to us. It enslaves us and crushes us.

[23 : 40] We can't rise up and we're weakened and weakened and the simple fact is that law keeping in that sense and for that purpose can never bring us to God.

The law is a slave driver and it simply brings us to defeat and to despair. And it's interesting, you see, although it's not, we're not going to look at it just now, at the beginning of Romans 8, Paul tells us that what the law could not do, that means what the law could not do for us because of the weakness of the flesh, you see it at the beginning of Romans 8, what the law could not do because of the weakness in our flesh, our fallenness, our shortcomingness, God did in his Son, who came in the likeness of sinful flesh, not in sinful flesh, but in the likeness of it.

And he came to do for us what we could not ourselves do. And Paul says here, when you think about the spirit of adoption, you mustn't think of being in bondage to the law.

The spirit is not a spirit who generates in us that servile spirit to the law, the bondage to the law, no. And so the Christian does not receive a spirit of bondage.

And that brings us to the second point. Christian receives the spirit of adoption. He says therefore, 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.

[25 : 49] Now if ever there was an easy three pointer, it's here. The second point divides up nicely into three points. And they're quite simple.

The leading of the spirit, the standing the spirit gives us, and the cry he works in our heart. As many as are led, verse 14, by the spirit, these are the sons or the children of God.

What is it to be led by the spirit of God? What does this mean? Some people claim to be led by the spirit of God and they've been led into new revelations that nobody else has had.

And some of their claims are pretty wacky. Is that what it is to be led by the spirit? How can we determine what being led by the spirit is?

Is it led into new visions or revelations? Is it led into some mystical experience, some secret ways unknown to others? It's amazing how people get caught up in novelty and intriguing things.

[27 : 09] Give them a mystery and they love it. It was never the Lord's purpose in gospel days to baffle our minds with mysteries, but to bring us into the full light and the understanding of the truth in Jesus.

And therefore to answer the question, what does it mean to be led by the spirit? Jesus himself gives us the answer. Jesus says in John 16 there, that when the spirit has come to you, he will lead you in all truth concerning me.

He will take what belongs to me and he will show you the truth. And when we think about the leading of the spirit that becomes the portion of those who are adopted sons and daughters, we must think of his leading in the truth.

You've heard me say it before and you know it no doubt, the spirit of God, the Holy Spirit is the principal author of the Bible. When we talk about Peter and John and James and Jude, and Matthew and the New Testament writers and all those Old Testament writers, some known and by name, others not known.

When we talk about them and we say, for example, the writer to the Hebrews, whether it's Paul, as some scholars think, or some other writer we can't identify, the substance of Hebrews is undeniably the work of the spirit.

[28 : 56] He's the principal author. And that can be said of everything from Genesis to Revelation. The spirit of God is the principal author, and he is the one who takes the truth of God and shows us the love of God to poor sinners like ourselves in Jesus.

Jesus. And he shows us not only the way whereby we are rescued from the wrath to come, but what it is to be brought into his family, to be adopted.

He leads us into the truth about adoption as well as other things. And he does this surely by turning our hearts to Jesus, us, and he turns our will to be obedient to Jesus.

It's the spirit who leads us in that way. He always leads us Christward. And that's important. That's important in terms of knowing where we are.

The spirit leads us ever and always to Christ. And the spirit therefore has to rebuke us sometimes when we're not going in the direction we know we ought to be going in.

[30 : 22] The spirit will rebuke us and correct us. And he turns not only our hearts to Jesus, but he makes us willing to follow.

It's the spirit therefore who leads us to forsake all these strivings we thought about in the first point. Making the law a stairway to heaven.

Thinking about the illustration of climbing the mountain, striving and straining every fiber of our being. No, no, the spirit leads us to forsake all strivings to secure salvation by our own efforts.

He leads us to abandon all notions that our rightness, our basic goodness will please God. Because he shows us we haven't got it.

And he shows us it can't be done. He leads us to see in Christ our all in all. And my dear friend, if that's the way you think today, if you are clear in your mind, that the only way to be in the family of God is through faith in Jesus.

[31 : 42] And not in our own strivings, in our own strength. But that we take Christ and all he is. End of story. That's it. We're in him.

We're adopted. The spirit of God, and only the spirit of God, makes us satisfied with that.

it's nice to go back in one's mind and remember some of the sermons, you know, that had a great impact on one's experience.

And one that I often come back to again and again, is that, it's not an easy passage, I admit, 2 Corinthians 5 towards the end of that passage, where he says, Paul says this, speaking about being reconciled to God.

For he that is God made him that is Christ, who knew no sin, to become sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[32 : 54] God and when I get into problems about where I am and what's happening in life, I come back there.

God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us. He condemned sin in Christ that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

My dear friends, the Spirit of God leads us into such things and confirms to us such truth. And it's important to ask ourselves quietly, has he really led me in this way?

If he has, then be encouraged. But I said three things. The next is the standing. As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God.

And it's clear from the passage that sons and children are synonyms in this passage. To be a child of God is to be a son of God.

[34 : 13] That's the standing we are given. the Spirit brings us into that position. You see verse 16 develops that. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Notice the emphasis. The Spirit himself bears witness. He's the supreme, if I can say it. He's the supreme adoption agent.

He witnesses. He confirms. And he can confirm it because when we believe in Christ, we believe because of the Spirit working in us.

We are united to Christ by the Spirit and the Spirit is the supreme, I say again, adoption agent. He says you are. This is what believing is about.

You're adopted into the family. It's one of the wonderful gifts of grace. things. And the Spirit has the right therefore, you see, to tell us, to witness to us through the truth, of course, that we are the children of God.

[35 : 40] And Jesus then, in a real sense, becomes our elder brother. Yes, our Savior and many other wonderful things about him. But it's good to remember that he becomes our elder brother.

We are made, listen to it, and if children, verse 17, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Adopted into the situation that we're joint heirs with Christ himself.

And you see, what comes through here, and this is, in showing us our standing, the Spirit shows us that we have that standing, not because we've tried to earn it, but because it's been given to us by the grace of God.

And we are graciously brought into that relationship that God regards us as his children through faith in Jesus.

And one of the most majestic texts of the Bible in this very connection, I once heard the late Mardewalik McLeod of Stormway preach a sermon, and they thought it was a wonderful sermon.

[37 : 00] 1 John 3, verse 1, Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God, and we are.

does that sound like God doesn't want us to know we're adopted? I don't think so. I think he's gracious to us in pointing up what is not the way, what is the servile spirit, the spirit of bondage, and he's saying the Holy Spirit is not that servile spirit, no he's the spirit of adoption.

It's his delight and pleasure, not only to unite us by faith to Christ, but to confirm to us, the Father has loved us in this way, that we should be called the children of God.

And we're therefore to glory in what he has done for us in Christ. And the last thing within this heading is the cry, is the cry, the leading, the standing, the cry.

We're told here that we have received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry out Abba, Father. Now the Hebrew word for Father is Av.

[38 : 37] The Aramaic word for Father is Abba. And it's an Aramaic word. It's a word that Jesus himself used. It's a familiar word that speaks of trust in one's good Father, Abba.

And I know there's a danger that calling God our Father can be overused. It can become over familiar. It can always be used like a punctuation mark in prayer.

one knows that. That's a danger. But there's another danger too. And that is that we don't use that at all. I think in our free church tradition we're weak here.

When we come to God in prayer we don't use that familiar term that he gives the adopted children the right to use. When I use it, and you'll know in prayer meetings and here in the church too, I use it quite frequently.

I never use it without thinking about the wonderful privilege it is to call him Father. To call the great God whose being is more awesome and majestic than we can comprehend.

[40 : 07] Yet he allows us to call him God by the spirit of adoption Father. It's an entitlement given by the spirit of adoption.

That's why again we read in Galatians 4. Paul says the spirit of God's son is sent into our hearts, into the hearts of those who believe in Christ, crying out Abba Father.

God's son is and in the joint airship with Christ I remind you that Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, you find it in Mark 14.34, that's what he said in prayer at the most intimate point, at the point of his greatest need there in the garden, Abba, if it is possible let this cap pass from me, nevertheless not as I will, but as you will.

And you know, when we're struggling in life with our difficulties, whether they're in our head, in the turmoil, in the labyrinth of life complicated, or whether it is in the load we carry, Abba, Abba, you know, Abba, you've allowed me to speak to you like this.

The spirit of adoption in our hearts enables us to cry Abba. And as the songwriter said, that Abba, that Holy Father, will never cause his child a needless tear.

[41 : 53] Let us then consider how futile it is to be striving in our own strength, in a slavish dread, in a futile hope of using the law as a ladder to heaven.

It's simply impossible. Let us rather be confirmed in the truth that by simply believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving him and all that he is, we are receiving the spirit of God's work on our behalf.

And that is the spirit who enables us as adopted children to cry out, Abba, Father.

Amen.