

Spirit of Adoption

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[0 : 00] We're going to have the Bible reading now. So this morning we are reading from Romans chapter 8, verses 12 to 17.

Romans 8 and verse 12. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. Provided we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him.

Good morning, my name's Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. I just need to get something out of the way, otherwise Simon and Matt won't listen to a word of this sermon. Yes, I've got a new polo shirt.

[1 : 22] They say I've got a preaching shirt. It's \$15. Now these guys can listen. That's great. All right. Why don't we pray as we come to God's word. Lord, as we just sung, my prayer is that for each one of us, you would increase our vision of you.

We need spiritual eyes to see you as you are. Lord, we spend our days trying to prove ourselves to others and even to you.

I pray that you would show us the folly of that and how we don't need to do that. And Lord, other times, and for some, this is a daily battle where we're just barely hanging on, thinking you can't be pleased with us.

Lord, I pray that you would deeply assure us of your love today through your word. I know my words are weak, but I pray that your powerful word would speak to each one of us.

Give us ears to hear. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I'm going to try and remind us of what we've seen in Romans 8 so far with a scenario.

[2 : 43] It's not real, but imagine you lived in a time and place that wasn't in a democracy, but under an absolute monarch, a king who is good and powerful.

But you've spent your days murmuring against this king, his right to rule you, just murmuring, publicly breaking his laws.

You've spent your days inciting others and applauding others who break his laws. You've spent your days harming his citizens.

You're a real bad egg. And one day you're caught, and this good and powerful king has all authority to send you to be hanged for permanent, solitary confinement.

You've got no excuse. You've got no defense. There's no path to appeal. He is the Supreme Court. Tomorrow you've got to face him to give an account.

[3 : 52] I doubt you'd get much sleep, would you? Your only plan is to plead for a second chance. Give me a second chance to prove myself that I can be a law-abiding citizen.

The charges are read out against you, and you forget some of the things you've done, and they're read out. Some of the horrible words and deeds, and finally the king says, no, I won't give you a second chance to prove yourself.

As of that moment, as of this moment, I forgive all your crimes.

I will pay any debt myself. Before all my kingdom, I declare you innocent. No one is to harm you.

I will never condemn you. Now that's something. I know this is a pretty poor illustration, but that's something of the picture of our justification. It's a pure gift.

[5 : 00] Now this king is so good and so powerful, he can even change your heart, the seat of your deepest desires, your will, your hopes. In place of your rebellious spirit, I give you my very own spirit.

He will empower you to freely choose, freely choose, to walk in my ways. That's something of our sanctification.

We are under this new influence in our lives. We don't have to fear being on the wrong side of the law again, because the law is helping us. The one in charge is with us, empowering us.

A new way of thinking. Now if that's all the king had done for you, you would spend your days owing him your love, your devotion, your gratitude.

You would have so much reason to tell anyone about the mercy of this king. You'd have every reason to praise him. But he's got more to say.

[6 : 05] I don't want you to only be a loyal, law-abiding citizen. Today I adopt you. Where'd that come from? I adopt you.

You have every legal right and privilege, including my inheritance as my heir. Treat my palace as your home. You are always welcome to come speak to me day or night.

My entire kingdom I share with you. Go, live, work, representing me as a son. We come today to the most wonderful reward that Jesus' death and resurrection has purchased for us.

Our adoption. It is from this status of being adopted, which we receive any and all privileges and blessings from God.

It is the best gift and it's the gift that we get everything else with and through. So those who live according to the Spirit, set their mind on the things of the Spirit, and the Spirit changes how we think.

[7 : 23] And what we're going to see today, the Spirit changes how we think about ourself, our old life, our old fleshly life. And the Spirit changes how we think about God.

The Spirit leads you to be killing your flesh and the Spirit assures you that the Father has adopted you. You share the Son's life.

Now I believe the first happens by the second. We're going to come to this. But leading us to kill the flesh, I think happens by the assurance that we really are children of God.

I hope you've got your Bibles open, by the way. And if you're on your phone and some notifications are popping up, shut it off. Listen to God's Word. Listen to God. There's a scene in the movie *The Best of Enemies*, which I just found really confronting.

I don't know what the word is. But *The Best of Enemies*, it's based on a true story. North Carolina in America in the 70s. So racism was rife.

[8 : 46] And after the Ku Klux Klan leader speaks against, in this public meeting, speaks against a proposal to let black children integrate into white schools, an African-American man stands up and says, brother.

Now everyone is shocked that he called him brother. And the African-Americans in the room are enraged. How dare you call this man who hunts and persecutes his brother?

Now, I think there's something of, when Paul says in verse 12, so then brothers. Like he's a Jew speaking to Jews and Gentile Christians.

And the division between Jew and Gentile was as heavy a hostility as we're seeing in Israel, Palestine. There was utter hatred.

So Paul, let's just, I don't want to skip over the word brother. It's not a filler word. There are no filler words in scripture. He means it. He uses brother every time he addresses his readers in this letter, 19 times.

[10 : 07] It's a very serious and wonderful word. So this part of God's word, it's addressed to brothers and sisters. If you love Jesus as your life, your hope, this word, and I'm going to be speaking this sermon to you.

But I just want to say at this point, if you're still searching for God, can I just invite you to please listen? Listen, I think this passage will show you the heart of God.

He hates religion. The heart of God, he wants to give his life as a pure gift, all his life. So I invite you to listen. So brothers, sisters, the Christian life is a supernatural one.

It's a supernatural experience, 24-7. It doesn't feel like it all the time, does it? It feels pretty ordinary. What we're doing now feels pretty ordinary.

Our sufferings feel like we're being ground into the dirt. But the Christian life is a transcendent life, 24-7. The third person of the triune God dwells in you.

[11 : 35] You are in him. It is a supernatural life. As I've seen, the spirit creates a new mindset, a new way of thinking.

And it results in a new lifestyle that actually produces real love. Not an imitation love. It's not us pretending to be God because it's God actually producing it in us. It's real love. It's not full yet. We want it to be. It's partial. But it's real. It actually fulfills his law. The Christian life is a supernatural experience. And it doesn't often feel that way and we don't automatically think that way which is I think why Paul starts with a warning. So then, brothers, we're debtors. We've got an obligation. It's not to the flesh. It's not. It's not to the flesh. Our flesh makes us feel like we have to obey it to be satisfied, to be who we are. [12:43] But we've got no obligation there. It's the Spirit who sets us free from sin. The Spirit indwelling us. Setting our minds on spiritual things, real things.

Enabling us to fulfill the law of love. It's the Spirit who leads us. It's the Spirit who puts to death the deeds of the body so that we live. It's the Spirit who will one day resurrect our physical bodies. It's the Spirit who testifies to our adoption. Our life is in the Spirit. Our obligation is in the Holy Spirit. That's where life is. Life and peace. Flesh, no obligation. Only leads to death. Now, flesh, I don't think it's about physical bodies per se, although the body is like a diseased body where sin is in it and we need a new body. But it's a deeper concept than that. Paul seems to use it that the flesh is more to do with a universal human nature, a disposition where we're hostile to God as we saw in previous verses. [13:57] We can't submit to God. His law comes and it incites us the more sin. So the body isn't bad.

God created the body good. We're told in chapter 6 to offer our members, offer your mind, offer your eyes, offer your hands as instruments for righteousness. So it's not, we've got to be clear, the body isn't bad. So this flesh is more about being hostile to God. Now I think when we think about hostility to God, I think there's two ways this can show itself. One is the more obvious kind of self-reliant way. I think it's summed up pretty well by the song you hear at a lot of funerals, Frank Sinatra. I did it my way. Regrets? I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention. [15:05] Really? Too few? Are you talking about yesterday or are you talking about a lifetime? Too few to, anyway, sorry. Maybe your life is a lot better than mine.

For what is a man? What has he got? If not himself, then he has naught. Let the record show I took all the blows and did it my way. Okay, there's that spirit. There's that hostile to God. But I think hostility toward God has to also include Paul's religious zeal that he wants to prove himself. I think it's hostile because if God says you need his son's blood and you throw that in his face and say, I've got this, I think that's hostility. I think Colossians 2, at the end of Colossians 2, it's a really amazing verse where it just goes, you think religion can make you good?

[16:23] All these rules, do not taste, do not touch, and then it finishes with this verse, these have indeed an appearance, an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and the severity of the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

That's incredible. All these rules, no value in stopping the flesh. You might not commit adultery, but the fantasies and the lusts of your thoughts you might not yell and use swear words, but it's bitter resentment against another image-bearer of God in your heart, filling your soul.

So I think there's a religious hostility, self-reliance, and the more obvious just get rid of God, self-reliance. self-reliance, self-ratifying, self-protecting flesh, and it feels like we must satisfy its desires to be content.

But brothers and sisters, however strong the demands feel, we owe nothing to it. It only leads in death, leads to death, verse 13.

[17:58] As John Owen famously put it, be killing sin, or sin will be killing you. Be killing sin, or sin will be killing you.

Now do you find verse 13 terrifying? How on earth does this condition, based on what you do or don't do, in order to get life, which in context here, I think has to mean eternal life, how does that fit with the assurance of verse 1?

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Now if you're overwhelmed by fear at this point, whenever you hear a warning in scripture, can I encourage you, don't try and handle that by moving away.

I think the answer is go further into the passage, make sure you understand it in its detail. Look at those little words for in verses 14 and 15, they are giving the reasons, why?

So for all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And sons here, just think firstborn inheritance, so that captures sons and daughters.

[19 : 25] All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. The Spirit given to us is not like living under the covenant of law, based on what you do, you live or die.

It's one of assurance and security. So however you read verse 13, it can't be to incite that kind of fear. So we're going to ask, how does the logic work?

I don't think it's immediately apparent how verse 13 fits with verse 14. all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

And I think we get ourselves into trouble, maybe we have false assurance if we give our own definition of led here. What does being led by the Spirit mean? I think we just insert our own definition rather than letting Scripture tell us.

Some look to supernatural gifts like speaking in tongues, others might think of led as in guidance, the Spirit is telling me to call so and so this afternoon.

[20 : 35] Now the Spirit might, he might do that, but is that what the definition of led is here? The Spirit is guiding me to marry this person, to invest in this whatever.

The most obvious definition of led is the preceding verse, verse 13. The Spirit leads us to put the deeds of the body to death.

So whenever our minds and our eyes and our tongue are about to be offered to sin, the Spirit leads us in violence.

Violence against ourselves. If you want eternal life, you must be violent. That's a weird thing to say, isn't it? You must be violent.

Not against other people. If you're online, slandering people in the name of Jesus, like, no, don't say the Spirit's leading you to do that.

[21 : 41] Not against other people. Not violent against society and the world at large. Some fundamentalist churches just want to cut themselves off. Oh, society is the problem.

problem. No. The leading here is you get violent against yourself. The Spirit influences you to be violent against yourself, to have a wartime sensitivity that you hear yourself cough and you're ready to pull the trigger.

Your attitudes, your words that are about to leave your mouth, where your eyes are going. You're gouging out eyes, you're cutting off hands. Like this world, we would have so much more peace if people were more violent against their violence.

If we were critical against our critical spirit of others, we need to get mean against our meanness towards others.

The tense of the verb here of putting to death is it's present. It's not past tense. It's saying putting to death. It's assuming an ongoing present war.

[23 : 02] It's not saying you have done it, you've completed this. And there's nothing here saying how much progress you need to make within a week or a month or a decade. We can say I'm nowhere near where I want to be, but I look back on the years of being a Christian, I'm not where I was.

Nowhere near where I want to be, but I'm not where I was. It doesn't say how much progress you need to make. The important thing is you're fulfilling this verse if you hate your sin because of Jesus' sake.

You can hate your sin for social disadvantage reasons. That's still fleshly thinking. But if you hate it for Jesus' sake, you can know you're fulfilling verse 13.

He's leading you to violence against the flesh. So let me summarize.

Here's how I think the logic between 13 and 14 works. If you hate that old, self-obsessed, hostile to God self that you feel as though you're just in this constant war with it, that's not evidence that you're not in Jesus.

[24 : 17] That's evidence you're being led by the Spirit. And if God is at work in you to make war on that old self, you're a son.

And if you're a son, God's children live because of Jesus. how does verse 13 fit with verse 1? You must be fighting to put the flesh to death. If you're in Jesus, if the Spirit's in you, he will ensure you will. You've just got a totally different mindset now.

Is it total? No, it's not. But it is different. And you can only get the victory if you are trusting in the full assurance of verse 1.

I really love how John Piper puts it. The only sin you can kill is a forgiven sin. I think that's wonderful. It's forgiven.

[25 : 23] That's the only one you can conquer. The only way you can fulfill verse 13 is if you believe verse 1. Whatever sin I'm tempted or doing right now is forgiven.

Then you can fight. Well, what does by the Spirit mean? Is that some spiritual method or steps? of changing your habits? There's heaps of worldly advice on how to change your habits. There's self-help videos, there's programs, there's silver bullets, but they're all based on rules.

They're all based on what you do. The Christian war is different. It's one of utter dependence. It's by the Spirit. We're active in it. It's us doing it.

But it's one of in myself, I'm helpless. I can't do it. But with you I can.

[26 : 34] It's that kind of attitude. So what does it mean? What does by the Spirit mean? I'm surprised Paul doesn't define it for us. I really want him to.

Come on, this is so important, Paul. Why didn't you give us the definition? Now some look to Ephesians 6 where you've got the picture of the armour of God and the sword of the Spirit is the word of God.

Now that's helpful because how do you fight lies? With truth, with God's word. So that's helpful. I think you'll get a long way if you're convinced of that definition.

Now I think there's actually something that's true, something that fits that and more, something even deeper and closer to Romans 8.

You don't have to jump to another book of the Bible. I think it's not fighting by a particular method but fighting with your new identity.

[27 : 34] Not a method but identity. Now I'm going to give you an illustration and then I'm going to try and show you, try and convince you that it is actually here in the text.

So our family, we've had a bit of sickness, I'm feeling well, just to put people at ease. And there's temperatures in the house. I heard recently from a researcher, they described the body's immune system.

Now I'm going to leave it to use science types and medicos to actually understand how that works. That's beyond me. But I was fascinated by the paradigm he used.

he was saying the immune system when it attacks dangerous cells, it doesn't look at a cell and go, is this good and I'll let it live or is it bad and I'll attack it and kill it.

It doesn't evaluate good and bad. It goes, is this cell foreign? It sees it and goes, that's not me. I'm going to attack it and kill it because it's not me.

[28 : 48] That cell is me and helps me live. I won't attack that. This cell is not me. Attack, kill. I think that's closer to something of what Paul is getting at here, of what by the spirit is.

It's saying be who you are now. Kill who you are not now. How do you know who you are? Not letting society's value tell you who you are and who you're not.

It's letting the gospel tell you who you are. Now, okay, I've got to don't be persuaded by an illustration. You've got to be persuaded by God's word.

Where am I getting this from? I think it's from how Paul is arguing in verses 14 to 17. He doesn't give us a particular method. He doesn't say pray like this, quote this verse, follow these steps.

He gives us identity. You're adopted, your sons, your children of God, your heirs. So I think it's how Paul thinks, how he argues.

[29 : 58] Or look at this wonderful chapter, which is all about life in the spirit, chapter 8. How does it begin and end? Verse 1, those who are in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Verse 39, nothing can separate us from God's love for those in Christ Jesus our Lord. Look at chapters 5 to 8 of Romans.

And I've put the verses in the outline. I'm not going to go through them all. But in Jesus, through Jesus, in Jesus, through Jesus, just throughout these chapters, it's teaching us to think, my life is

bound up in Jesus.

What's true of him is true of me. So I think, like the immune system, the spirit helps us identify anything that isn't Christ in us and makes war on it.

Who I am now in Christ changes our view of ourselves. We hate that old flesh now. It also changes our view of God and I think our view of God is the power to hate our old self.

[31 : 18] No longer fear of his abandonment, but assured. So verses 15 to 17. To appreciate this doctrine of adoption, we need to remember the precondition for our adoption.

There is deep personal trauma before there is assurance. I got in my inbox this week, I didn't take it as coincidence, thank you for helping with the sermon again this week, an article on adoption by an American lady named Melinda Just.

Now, Americans just celebrated Thanksgiving, so it's in that context, and she starts the article like this. What do I have to be thankful for?

My own dad didn't want me. That's brutal, isn't it? she later says, to be able to view adoption as beautiful, she's talking about a human adoption, I needed to become comfortable with understanding how much of my life and my worldview was shaped by the trauma of abandonment. So I think for all of us spiritually, if we want to see the beauty of adoption, we need to face our trauma. I once did not belong to God's family, though made in his image, I belong to Adam's family tree, and in his hostility to God, not because God's the kind of God who leaves, but I deserve him to abandon me.

[33 : 20] I deserve it. forever. And it's on that dark backdrop that verse 15 is just, this whole section really, but it's a wonderful truth.

You did not receive the Spirit, this is talking about the Holy Spirit, the nature of the Holy Spirit, not our Spirit. You did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

You've received the Spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father. the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Melinda goes on to say of her earthly dad, I was old enough for him to look at me and say, no way. But he didn't. He picked me.

He gave me his name. He claimed me. It took me 30 years to fully understand and claim the enormity of my forever dad's decision to bring me into his home, his heart and his life.

[34 : 48] We might be tempted to think that adoption is somehow second class children. That is wrong. In the Roman world, an adopted son had all the social privileges as an heir, as a natural born.

More importantly, in the Old Testament context, Israel was God's son, sons. But what should have been Israel's is now true of those with faith in the son.

Paul is transferring that title to believers. But most important is that these are Jesus' own words. things. We can cry.

Now, I think cry isn't so much about being really loud or crying with tears, but we might do both. There's times to do both. This is more about we can cry. It comes up from the depth of our being. We can cry. And what can we cry? The eternal son who used this little Aramaic word, Abba.

[36 : 02] Now, Jews did not use this about God. It is way too emotional. It's too personal. It's too intimate. It wasn't reverent enough. This is the eternal son's word, Abba.

father. We share the son's relationship with the father. Not second class. We have his relationship to the father.

We share the son's inheritance. We're heirs of God. Now, I think that means we're heirs of all God's promises. Maybe it also includes God himself is the greatest inheritance.

Jesus, that's his inheritance. He was obedient. He deserves that reward. But it's all ours. Only legitimate children get the inheritance.

And we are, by faith, legitimate children. A guy called Tim Challey is a blogger.

[37 : 12] He says, a few weeks ago I stood in the humblest of villages in the distant reaches of rural Cambodia. This is a village that has not yet been reached by electricity or running water.

I love electricity and running water. This place hasn't been reached by that. Yet, it has been reached by the gospel. They wear the disguise of farmers, but even though their homes are tiny and unadorned, and even though they wear no crowns or own no robes, they are most truly princes and princesses who simply await their full inheritance.

I wonder if we see believers that way, see ourselves that way. We share the son's relationship to the father, we share his inheritance, and we share the son's sufferings.

We share in his life fully. Now, what does this mean? Because unbelievers suffer. Let's not kid ourselves.

It's not like we've got a monopoly on suffering. The rest of Romans 8, I think, teaches us more about this Christian suffering, so we'll say more in future weeks.

[38 : 29] But notice here that a key phrase, we're glorified with him, but we also suffer with him. It's not suffer like him, it's with him.

When you're a son of God, how you see suffering, it changes. It changes. It is now with him. With him, we trust that he's working all things for good, for those who love God, to be conformed to the son's character.

With him, if we're persecuted because we bear his name, we're honoured. We're with him. If we're with him, we choose to lay down our lives so that people hear this gospel to be saved.

We choose suffering, not just accept it. with him. We look forward to being with him and like him.

We're going to be free from this weak, fleshly struggle with our sin.

In that hope, we push through and keep on fighting this fight, which is a form of suffering. suffering. I think that phrase, with him, is a beautiful phrase.

[40 : 04] And nothing shows the depths of our adoption if while he slays us, we still trust. Father, I know you love me. Wow.

Wow. We cry, Abba, Father, with him. So whenever you don't feel like you can see God as Father, maybe you're hearing all this and it's wonderful, but it's not for you and you just don't feel it.

And I encourage you, look back at the objective truth, to remind you that you've got nothing to prove here. There is therefore now no condemnation in Christ Jesus.

Melinda, going back to Melinda, she says, just like my earthly adoption, my spiritual adoption is a gift. I didn't earn it. It is pure grace upon grace.

I often catch myself trying to prove my worth. But my God reminds me that his grace is sufficient in my lack. At times I still struggle to understand God as a father, but he doesn't push me away.

[41 : 31] He continues to press his gift into my hand. love. He continues to love. He continues to love. He continues to love. He continues to love. The father gives you his unconditional, maximal love.

And the triune God will keep pressing his gift of adoption into our hands. Instead of looking at you and saying, no way.

his only son was abandoned. To claim you, to give you his name, to share his home, his heart, his life.

And the rest of Romans 8 assures us he will never abandon us. The son went to the cross so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

Hebrews tells us he is not ashamed to call us brothers. The son of God is not ashamed to think of you, say of you, brother, sister.

[42 : 45] And the spirit we have received is not one of fear. Fear of measuring up and if we don't we're going to be abandoned. It's not that spirit.

Spirit is the spirit of adoption. Unconditional. Maximal love. So I want to finish by asking a very quick question.

How are you trying to prove your worth? How are you currently trying to prove your worth? In the world's eyes?

How are you trying to prove your worth in your family? How are you trying to prove your worth in this church? You've got nothing to prove.

In fact, efforts of trying to prove yourself, once you've got spiritual eyes to see, it's pretty pathetic. let the spirit of adoption lead you to be violent against that sort of thinking that you need to prove yourself.

[44 : 05] That self-reliant, proving, unworthy of love, let the spirit of adoption lead you to fight that and kill it. That's not me because I belong to Jesus.

I am a son. I am adopted. We are brothers. We share the same cry. Abba. Abba.

Will you pray with me? Let's pray. Holy God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, how we struggle to believe that you invite us into your eternal life.

Lord, we're so used to people in this world treating us based on what we can offer them. We're so used to our own pride, wanting to earn our way.

Lord, I pray that you'd press this gift of adoption more deeply into each of our hearts and minds so that we might return the great love you've given us, that we might have great security in who we are, so that we might treat one another in the church in a way that reflects this gospel, and so that we might fight the flesh flesh, that isn't me anymore, so that we might enjoy this gift of being your sons and daughters more.

[46 : 01] I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.