

Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION (ROMANS 8:15)

I. What Now?

II. The Importance of Romans 8:15

- A. Romans 8:15 establishes the link between our Lord Jesus Christ and us.
- B. How is it possible that what Christ did so many years ago, that what happened to Christ so many centuries ago, has any relevance to you and me today?
 - 1. Romans 8:15 shows us just how we are connected with Jesus.
 - 2. *What connects us to Jesus and makes it possible for us to know God as Father the way Jesus himself did is the Holy Spirit himself—the same Holy Spirit who dwelt upon the Branch of Jesse, upon the Son of David.*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Romans 8:15 establish the link between our Lord Jesus and us? Who connects us to Jesus and all his works?

III. The Gospel According to Romans

- A. Paul's letter to the Romans is contains a lot of deep Christian doctrine.—The great doctrines of the Gospel, along with those doctrines that make the Gospel possible—namely, the doctrines of grace and predestination—are all here in the book of Romans.
- B. In Romans 1-5, Paul talks about how sinners can be saved.—We are saved by trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God gave as a propitiation for our sins, who lived a life of perfect righteousness for all of us.
- C. In Romans 6:1-8:39, Paul focuses on how salvation affects us.
 - 1. The link between God's grace and our personal holiness is our unity/solidarity with Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
 - 2. In Romans 6:10-11, Paul says this: “For the death *he* died *he* died to sin, once for all, but the life *he* lives *he* lives to God. So *you* also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”
 - 3. The idea here is that what was true of Jesus is now true of us who are joined to him.
 - a. Just as Jesus died to sin, we who belong to Jesus have also died to sin.
 - b. Just as Jesus lives to God forever, we who belong to Jesus must now devote our lives entirely to God as well.

- c. Therefore, it is out of our unity with Christ, our solidarity with Christ, that our good works emerge.
- d. Apart from Christ, it is not possible for us to do deeds that are pleasing to God.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What are some of the teachings contained in Paul's letter to the Romans? (2) What is the topic of Romans 1-5? (3) What is the topic in Romans 6:1-8:39? (4) How are God's grace toward us, and our personal holiness connected? (5) What does Romans 6:10-11 teach us about how our good works are produced?

IV. The Life Giving (Sin Killing) Spirit of Life

- A. In Romans 8, Paul calls our attention to the Holy Spirit.
 - Romans 8:1-2: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.”
 - 1. Those who are joined to Christ are no longer under the rule of sin and God's condemnation.
 - 2. The Christian has been freed from the old influences of disobedience-and-curse, and brought under a new rule.
 - 3. This new rule is not just some abstract theological principle. This new rule is really none other than a person, the Holy Spirit of God himself, called here, “the Spirit of life.”
- B. Because we have the Holy Spirit, you and I no longer *need* to live according to the flesh.
 - 1. By the power that comes from the Spirit of life, the Christian is able to “put to death the deeds of the body,” that is, the deeds of sin (8:13).
 - 2. Whatever habits of sin that used to grip us can now be overcome by the power of the Spirit of life!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Romans 8:1-2, what does the Holy Spirit do for Christians? (2) The Spirit enables Christians to put sin to death. How do you access the Spirit's power to overcome your sins?

V. The Spirit-Led Sons of God (Romans 8:14)

- A. It is also by the power of the Spirit that the Christian is able to do something else, which we will see in verse 15.
- B. Paul writes in verse 14: “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”
 - 1. Those who have the Spirit of God will be led by the same Spirit.
 - 2. Since God is holy and righteous, those who have God's Spirit will necessarily be led toward holiness and righteousness as well.
- C. Because they are led by the Spirit of God, Paul announces the great truth concerning these people: They are “sons of God.”

D. To see the impact of verse 14 more clearly, let's consider it with another passage, Romans 1:1-4.

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,

1. According to Paul, the Gospel is about the Son of God, Jesus Christ.
2. Jesus “*was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead...*”

E. When we come to Romans 8:14, you can certainly see the connections between the key concepts.

1. Just as Jesus was declared to be the Son of God according to the Holy Spirit, we who have been joined to Jesus, are also declared to be sons of God by the same Holy Spirit.
2. What was true of Jesus is now true of us who are joined to him by faith (albeit in a smaller way).
—*By the Holy Spirit, you and I share in the same status of sonship that belongs to Jesus Christ our Lord.*
3. Of course, we share only in the human and royal sonship of Jesus, not his *divine* sonship, which is unique to Jesus alone.
4. But nevertheless, it is still Jesus' sonship that we share in all the same.
5. Just as Jesus is Son of God, we too are all sons of God!

***Questions for reflection:** (1) According to Paul in verse 14, what is a distinguishing mark of the sons of God? (2) In what directions will the Holy Spirit lead the Christian? (3) What light does Romans 1:1-4 shed light on Romans 8:14? How does Romans 1:1-4 help us understand 8:14?

VI. We Have Received the Spirit of Adoption

A. How are we able to experience the honor of being counted amongst the sons of God?

1. Paul spells it out for us in verse 15.
—“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!’”

B. In this verse, our heavenly Father is teaching us two important things through Paul.

1. God did not give us the Holy Spirit as “the spirit of slavery” (*pneuma douleias*)
 - a. A Spirit of slavery would cause us “to fall back into fear.”
 - b. This fear is *not* the healthy fear or reverence for God, which all of us should have.

- c. Rather, it is a slavish fear of God;
 - i. the kind of fear that makes us afraid of going to God.
 - ii. the kind of fear that drives us to obey God not out of love, but merely out of a desire to escape punishment.
 - d. This fear also includes all the other lesser fears that people face—
 - death
 - sickness
 - the loss of a job
 - the negative perceptions from others
2. God has given us “the Spirit of adoption” (*pneuma huiothesias*).

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What kind of a Spirit did God not give us? What would a spirit of slavery cause? (2) What kind of fear would a spirit of slavery cause? (3) What kind of Spirit has God given to us?

VII. Adoption in the Greco-Roman World

- A. Adoption is the act of taking a child or person who is not your own flesh and blood as your own child.
- B. Once a person is adopted, all the rights and privileges of sonship apply.
- C. In the Greco-Roman society to which Paul wrote, adoption was very important to society.
 - 1. The Romans considered the family to be the basis of society.
 - 2. Adoption was one way to ensure that family lines survived.
- D. The Roman emperors themselves were known to have adopted people to ensure that they would have successors to the thrones.
 - 1. Augustus Caesar was the adopted son of Julius Caesar.
 - 2. Tiberius Caesar was the adopted son of Augustus.
- E. Oftentimes, even slaves were adopted so that their owners would have sons to carry on the family name.
- F. Given the immense value that was placed on family by the Romans, adoption was an important cultural institution that kept families going—and also brought dignity and honor to those who were adopted.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) What is adoption? (2) What did adoption confer on the one adopted? (3) Why was adoption so important in the Greco-Roman world? (4) Who were some Roman emperors that were adopted by their preceding emperors?

VIII. The Greatness of Our Adoption by God

- A. Given this background behind the word “adoption,” it’s clear that Paul has chosen a metaphor that speaks to the hearts of people in the Greco-Roman world.
- B. But Paul takes up the well-known concept of adoption and places it within a much grander context—our adoption by the sovereign King of the universe himself.

- C. What role does the Holy Spirit play in our adoption then?
1. The decision to adopt us is made by God the Father.
—Ephesians 1:5: God the Father “predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ.”
 2. God adopts us by means of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 3. The Holy Spirit comes from God the Father through God the Son and enables us to experience our adoption.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Paul use the adoption metaphor, so common in the Greco-Roman world? (2) What role does the Holy Spirit play in our adoption?

IX. By Whom We Cry, “Abba! Father!”

- A. The Holy Spirit of adoption causes us to *become aware of*, or *experience*, the state of adoption that Jesus accomplished for us.
1. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson: “The ministry of the Spirit of adoption brings us to a deep-seated persuasion that we really are the sons of God” (*Children of the Living God*, 71)
- B. This is what we see now in the rest of verse 15: The Spirit of adoption is the One “by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”
1. By the Holy Spirit of adoption, “we”—you and I—are enabled to respond to God.
 2. What then is that response?
—We call God by the terms, “Abba! Father!” (*Abba ho patēr*)
 3. “Abba” is an Aramaic term of endearment for father.
 - a. It is respectful—not as informal as “Daddy.”
 - b. But it also connotes intimacy, familiarity, and affection.
 - c. There is no exact equivalent in English for “Abba.”
 - d. The word may best be rendered, “Dearest Father” or “Beloved Father” (Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, 95).
 4. What is of even greater relevance is precisely that “Abba” was the word that Jesus himself used for God.
 - a. Jews of Jesus’ day had no problem acknowledging that God was the Father of the whole nation of Israel.
 - b. But when the Jews prayed, they would not use an intimate term like “Abba.”
 - c. Instead, they would call God by lofty, transcendent terms like “King of the universe” or “Almighty Lord.”
 - d. “Abba” was really Jesus’ own word for God.
- C. The fact that the Spirit of adoption enables us to call God “Abba! Father!” is telling.
—*It tells us that the same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus is now also in us.*

***Questions for reflection:** (1) “The Holy Spirit of adoption causes us to *become aware of*, or *experience*, the state of adoption that Jesus accomplished for us.” Discuss. (2) What response to God does the Holy Spirit enable us to give? (3)

What does the word “Abba” mean? How may we translate it into English? (4)
What is the significance of using the word “Abba” for God? Who else used it? (5)
Our ability to call God *Abba* “tells us that the same Holy Spirit who was in Jesus is now also in us.” Reflect on this.

X. Cry for Abba!

- A. But Paul does not only say that we are to *call* God our Father.
—He says that we *cry out* to God, “Abba! Father!”
- B. This word “cry” is a word of emotion and passion.
 - 1. We cry out when...
 - a. we are full of joy.
 - b. we are hanging on to life by a thread!
 - 2. Crying out is not a polite act.
 - 3. Moreover, we cry out to those we can trust, to those we believe can help us.
- C. When the Holy Spirit of adoption comes into our lives, he creates in us a sense of childlike trust in God.
 - 1. He creates in us the sense that God really does love us, and that we really are God’s beloved children!
 - 2. When we get this awareness of God’s love, we are finally able to pray!
 - 3. The prayer that emerges may not be full of words or doctrine—it may be a simple cry for help: “Abba, help me! Father, have mercy on me!”
 - 4. But such prayer pleases God because it is born out of the Spirit of Jesus himself.

***Questions for reflection:** (1) The Holy Spirit enables us to *cry out* to God. What sort of an action is “crying out”? (2) “When the Holy Spirit of adoption comes into our lives, he creates in us a sense of childlike trust in God.” Reflect and discuss.

XI. Start By Crying Out to Your Beloved Father

If we desire to know God as Father, if we seek a deeper experience of God as our beloved Abba, this is a good place to start: Know that the Holy Spirit of adoption has been given to you—and *cry out to your Father in heaven!*