

Sermon 68: Romans 8:15: The Spirit of Adoption

OUTLINE

The facts of adoption
The benefits of adoption
The implications of adoption

INTRODUCTION

What is the greatest benefit of our salvation? Where do we enjoy the most blessing in our salvation? Some might argue that the greatest blessings is the new birth for we experience a great exertion of power and are brought from death to life; some might argue that justification is the greatest blessings because we are given a new status of righteous. However, many have argued that the greatest blessings we experience is adoption. For it is in being adopted that we are not merely made alive or righteous, which are truly great things, but in adoption we are made part of the family of God. We now call God Father and have all the rights and privileges of a child. We have God in the closest relation not merely life and He is all. John Calvin when he dealt with all the titles of the Holy Spirit he put in first place the one we are considering today, that the Spirit is the Spirit of adoption.

Paul has given us two reasons for assurance so far in this chapter. That Christ has taken away our condemnation v1-4; and that if we have the Spirit of holiness and are characterized by holiness, then we have life; He is also the guarantee of our final resurrection and we are sons of God. Paul's third thought that we are beginning to consider today is that since we have the Spirit of adoption, we need not fear, we relate to God as Father, we have an inheritance and we will finally be glorified if true children. These thoughts are found in v15-17.

Paul tells us that we have not received a spirit of slavery which puts us back in the precarious position in that we were in before we had faith in Christ. He sums up that time in one word 'fear'. On account of our sins and our guilt fear was the inevitable emotion. We were enemies of God and under a certain sentence of terrible and unbearable punishment. The Holy Spirit does not create that fear in God's children we have been fully forgiven and need not fear judgement any more. Those who preach judgement and hell to God's children are not preaching by the Spirit of God but this false spirit of slavery that Paul says we have not received. No, we have received the Spirit of adoption and not slavery and today we will take a closer look at the doctrine of adoption and the Spirit's relationship to it. We will look at the basic facts of adoption, the benefits of adoption and the implications of adoption for how we are to live our lives as God's children.

The facts of adoption

The word adoption implies that we were once not children of God but are now. This is an obvious but a very important point. Not every human being is a child of God. Only those

who have been born again, believed upon Christ and been justified, it is those alone who are God's children not everyone in the world. It is an old lie of Liberalism that God is the universal father of everyone and therefore we are all brothers. The trouble is this lie is alive and well in evangelicalism. If you read the children's books written by Max Lucado you will see him telling every child that is born in Adam that God's loves them as if they were already one of His adopted children. He makes no distinction between God's love for His adopted children in Christ and His enemies who need to be born again. Before we become Christians we are enemies of God and the only spiritual father we have is the devil.

Our adoption was not a reactionary thought by God but something that was planned in eternity past when He set His love upon us before the foundation of the world. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3-6, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.' He did not adopt us because there was anything special in us, anything worthy or attractive we are adopted by grace not by deserving it. This is how God explains Israel's election to them, Deut. 7:6-8, '"For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.' It is on account of God's faithfulness to His covenant and promises that we are adopted not that we earn it or are worth it. In all honesty we had earned nothing but His wrath and that is why Paul describes us as children of wrath in Ephesians 2:3.

When does adoption happen? Now with all of this talk of children, birth and adoption some have confused the bible's teaching of new birth, being born again, with the bible's teaching on adoption. In many people's minds these two teachings are equated. However, there are some careful distinctions that we need to make in order that we do not blur the truth and create an atmosphere for error. We will map this out in terms of the Ordo Salutis.

In the event of our individual salvation, God is the catalyst whose first act in saving us is drawing us to Himself in an effectual call (John 6:44). Without this call no one will come because in our sinfulness we will always reject Christ (Rom 8:7, 1 Cor 2:14). God's effectual call includes the act of His regenerating us, in other words, giving us the new birth (John 3:3-8). It is this necessary change in our hearts that enables a free and true faith and repentance to rise up in the sinner towards Christ. The bible therefore talks about faith and repentance as gifts, (Eph 2:8-9, 2 Tim 2:25), and portrays God as the one who opens the heart for salvation (Acts 16:14, 11:18). This change we call regeneration, and the new birth. But this must not be confused with our adoption.

Various considerations force us to make this distinction. Firstly, there are texts which point us in this direction, John 1:12, "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." Here we see a clear indication that faith precedes the legal right to become a child of God. Secondly, the very nature of adoption and the words used to describe what God does are not suited to indicating a state induced by natural birth, but rather a case of one who is not a child by nature being given the status of a child. You do not adopt a natural child, but one who is not born to you. So we understand the state of adoption, not to be a description of one's birth into the kingdom of God, but rather a legal status conferred to us. It should not be doubted that regeneration fits us with new abilities that enable us to fulfil the duties of our new sonship, but our act of adoption should not be confused with the act of the new birth. Adoption, along with Justification is seen to be a legal declaration not a description of our being.

When do we receive the Spirit of adoption? The Spirit is working in us in regenerating us before we believe to enable faith and repentance, but this is not the time when He is the Spirit of adoption to us. No we are told in Ephesians 1:13-14 that we receive the Spirit as the seal of our adoption after we have believed not before, 'In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.'

So then, if you have not believed upon Christ for salvation then you are not an adopted child of God, if you have believed, then you are and have already received that Spirit as the seal and guarantee of your inheritance.

The final stage of our adoption is when we receive our new bodies. We are technically adopted but have not yet received the full benefits but only some of them so far, Paul tells us this in Romans 8:23, 'And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.' We are sons of God in status, we are sons of God in heart, but we are not yet sons of God in body, the day we receive our glorified bodies this will be remedied.

The benefits of adoption

What do we have if we are children of God? Let's approach this question incrementally. What would a child get if they were adopted into your family? What kind of parent or sibling would you be? What financial benefits would they enjoy? What depth of intimacy would they have with you? What sort of inheritance would you leave them? What would a child get if they were adopted into Brad Pitt's and Angelina Jolie's family? Or if a child is adopted by the richest man in the world? Or by the best Christian in the world? Can it be compared with being adopted by God? Never!

Paul contrasts what we have with the fear and slavery that we no longer experience. Words like peace, freedom, joy, assurance, life and security are part of what we now experience.

In the first instance we have been united to an eternal family, the body of Christ and have been received into fellowship. We are not the single spoilt child of a millionaire who is bored with his privileges and gets into trouble looking for fulfilment, we have a family in Christ, people who we will be united with forever and ever who death cannot steal from us.

Primarily though we have a new relationship to God. Paul tells us that the Holy Spirit causes us to cry 'Abba! Father!' These are the exact same words that Jesus used to address the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36. When Jesus prayed He always used the title Father and only once used the name God when He was quoting Ps. 22:1 while dying on the cross, 'My God, My God why have you forsaken me?' Christ's intimacy with the Father through this title was extremely controversial to the Jews for it intimated that Jesus was equal to the Father and they sought to stone Him for it, John 5:18, 'This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.' The amazing thing about being adopted is although we are not naturally children of God we are adopted and granted certain privileges the most important of which is a new relationship to God as Father. We will not be able to relate to God the Father as Father in every way the Son did but we have been brought into an intimacy that is unprecedented in history. Every Jew thought of God as their Father but it was more a title of respect than intimacy, in the NT we are brought closer to God as personally cherished and loved by Him. We are now received into the Father's presence as if we were the Son Himself. We dressed in His righteousness, we come in His name, we are filled by His Spirit and we are loved as He was loved, John 17:23, 'I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.' It was this glorious truth that was the first Jesus wanted to share with His disciples after He had resurrected from the dead, He sent Mary to the disciples with this message, John 20:17, 'Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" He has made it so that you now have as much right to call on Him as Christ did. By being united to His Son, by being clothed in His righteousness, by being filled with His Spirit, by being transformed into His image, by coming and asking in His name God has enabled us to be children of God. It is not something of our own doing or making that fits us for this position but it is something wrought by God from beginning to end.

This is the most wonderful thing that can ever happen to you. Becoming a child of God is better than being an angel, it is better than marriage, it is better than winning the lottery, it is better than being the richest man on earth. We have been brought into the closest relation to God that any creature can be brought. The Son who is one with the Father was made one with our human nature, and having united Himself to our natures, the Spirit unites us to the God man that through the Son we might have a new relation with the Father. Father, Son and Spirit are all exercised in condescending love to serve us and unite us as closely to Himself as we can be. We will never be God, we will never be a natural Son like Jesus but we are as close as any creature can be to God and in the closest relation to enjoy every blessing. We will enjoy the rewards and inheritance of Christ.

What does this mean for us now? Well think for a moment about the suffering and trials we go through. We are aware that God is acting in judgement in small ways in this life, and many a Christian is insecure when they go through trials. The Christians thinks to himself, I have sinned and now God who is holy must punish me, He must cast me off. This cancer that I am experiencing, this financial struggle that I am experiencing, this pain I am experiencing it is God punishing me for my sins. The trouble with this view is that we have failed to see the full significance of God as our Father. He is for us and not against us, any grief that comes to us is never as Judge but always from a Father. He is exercising His power to protect you, He is concerned to work out His purpose of holiness in your life and this happens in suffering and trials. God is causing all things to work for the good of His church and His glory. And even when we do suffer as a chastening for sin, it is always from a heart of perfect love and for a perfect purpose to the perfect degree. There is never spite or malice, or evil intent or any overkill or extreme measures as He deals with us. Psalm 103:13-14, 'As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.' Words that you should use to describe His dealings with you are tenderness, compassion, gentle, longsuffering, merciful. Do not see God as a Sergeant Major, or a malicious head teacher, or a grumpy dad, but think on how He looks upon His own Son and the delight He takes in His Son, He has made it so that He now delights in you too.

Let the Spirit teach you of your standing before God and how we are able to stand in Christ before Him as children, let the Spirit arouse that cry 'Abba! Father!' Dare to call Him Father, for this is what He now is to you in Christ. You the enemy who deserves hell, you the wretch who chooses insipid and disgusting sin in the place of our beautiful God. You whose love is not worth the price that was paid to secure it. He has adopted you and you are now His child. Magnify God now and call upon Him not on the basis of what you deserve but on the basis of the grace that is ours in Christ. Your portion now is greater than Adam's ever was. When you pray 'Our Father' do it with the knowledge that you are heard as Christ was heard, not on account of your goodness but on account of His.

There are other benefits that relate to our assurance and inheritance but we will deal with those in coming messages.

The implications of adoption

If this is what God has done for us, how should we then live? We have a new identity that should radically impact how we act. We are not slaves to sin, we are not children of the devil, we are not headed for the rubbish dump but eternal glory and we are to act according to what God has made us to be. When a millionaire adopts a street child they expect to see them sleep in a bed and not on the floor, eat a full meal, and give up the drugs and fighting. How much more should we who have been clothed in Christ's righteousness, filled with His Spirit, being transformed into His image, who are made partakers in His inheritance and who now have God as our Father behave like children of God. In imitation of our adoptive Father we are to love the unworthy, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those

who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' (Matt. 5:43-48.)

We should pray seeking the honour of God's name to be magnified, His will done and His kingdom come, 'Pray then like this: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' (Matt. 6:9-10). We should not live for the things of this world and sunken under worry about our daily provisions, 'For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. "Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.' (Matt. 6:33-34).

We should not judge our brother, and be believing in prayer, matt. 7:7-11, "'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. 9 Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? 11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!'

Because God has loved us and forgiven us our sins we should forgive others, Ephesians 5:1-2, 'Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.'

We are not to be grumblers but lights to this dark world, Phil. 2:14-15, 'Do all things without grumbling or questioning, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.'

We are loved with an incomprehensible love and should be holy in gratitude with the attitude of a son not a slave, 1 John 3:1-3, 'See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.'

Being adopted should cause us to see ourselves very differently and change the way we do everything.

