

The Spirit of Adoption

August 11th, 2013

Romans 8:14-17, Galatians 4:4-7

¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵For 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!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and 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."

⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

We'll return to Romans 8 shortly, but before we dig into Paul's words, let's take a look at Luke 3:21-22. Remember, I said that I wanted you to see connections between what Luke has been telling us about the role of the Spirit in Jesus' ministry, and then have us marvel at the fact that the very same Spirit that empowered and energized Jesus while He walked the earth is now available to us, so that you can't say as you watch Jesus in the gospels, "Well, that was Jesus. I can't do/experience that, He's the Son of God!"

No! Luke takes pains at the outset of Jesus' ministry to call attention to the Spirit's work in Jesus' ministry, because he knows that he will conclude this account of Jesus' life and begin his sequel (Acts) with Jesus' promise to send the Spirit to His disciples, and the fulfillment of that promise on the day of Pentecost. The same Spirit that was in Jesus is now in you, if you belong to Him (Romans 8:9). So as we look at Jesus in Luke, we can expect that the Spirit will do in and for us the very things we see the Spirit doing in and for Jesus. And at the outset of Jesus' ministry, that is assuring Jesus of His Father's love:

²¹Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²²and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Before Jesus moves out in any public ministry, He hears the voice of His Father declaring, "I love you; You are my Son, You give Me great pleasure!" And the Spirit of God is coming upon Jesus communicating God's love to Jesus. Do you know this experience? Do you hear the Spirit confirming to you that God the Father delights in you, that you're a joy to Him, that you are a beloved child? This experience is meant for you too! The Spirit did that in and for Jesus, and He is given to you so that you might know and taste this very same experience (see John 17:23, 20:17; cf. Romans 5:5).

It's this experience that Paul writes of in Romans 8. This is huge; if you don't know this experience, you don't belong to Him! So let's look at these verses, and what we'll learn is that the Spirit confirms our adoption by stirring up family affection between the believer and God, in the midst of painful suffering on the way to our family inheritance.

The Spirit Confirms our Adoption...

First, the Spirit confirms our adoption: "¹⁴*For* (we'll see the connection with verses 12-13 next week, to see another crucial work of the Spirit in our lives) all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." So how do we know we are sons of God? By being led by the Spirit of God; that's the mark, or seal, by which we know that we are sons (not the gender neutral, "children") of God. He confirms our adoption, or, literally, our sonship.

This is an important distinction. The Spirit doesn't bring about our adoption; He is given to help us experience our adoption. The human process of adoption has two basic parts. First, there is a legal transaction that must take place. A judge makes a record to declare that a certain child is now the son or daughter of a certain couple, and the child now has the family name and the rights that go with being a member of that family. It's all very legal.

So before the Spirit comes into to do the second part of our adoption (give experiential confirmation of our adoption), we must know that something has already happened legally which brings about our adoption as God's children, something which precedes this work of the Spirit that Paul is describing. We're not told what that something is here, because Paul has already written in great depth about it in Romans 3-5, but you can see it in Galatians 4, a passage which has many similarities to this one in Romans 8:

"⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

Here is what God has done legally, objectively, in history, apart from anything you do or feel, so that you might receive adoption as sons, and this is not the work of the Spirit, but of the Son: "¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree." By living a life of perfect submission to the law, and bearing in His body of flesh the punishment for disobeying the law, Jesus has redeemed (set us free from slavery by paying a price) us from our bondage to a law that we cannot keep, and has obtained for us our adoption as sons.

...by Stirring Up Family Affections...

But God isn't content to just adopt you into His family in a legal sense, just as no one going through a process of adoption wants this relationship to be strictly legal. You go through all the legal red tape of adoption with a view towards the second part of adoption, when the child is welcomed into the family, and day by day, a love, trust and an affection grows that gives the child a sense of belonging and security.

I've shared this illustration before: envision a five year-old girl on her first day with her adopted family. She has, by virtue of her adoption, a new status (a new identity). But on that first day in her new family, she struggles to live out of that new identity. She moves around nervously in her new home, fearing one of the beatings she used to get when she broke something. Her toys are untouched; she can't believe they're for her. At dinner she stuffs food in her pockets, not knowing when she may get another meal.

What's missing? A legal transaction has occurred, and this child has a new status, but they're not yet living in the experience of family love of adoption. What's missing, if we bring this illustration back into the biblical world of adoption, is the ministry of the Spirit:

*"⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. ⁶**And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!"**"*

*"¹⁴For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵**For** (here's at least one thing Paul means by being led by the Spirit; here's what the Spirit does to confirm your adoption) 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!"*"

God, in His love, is not content to "just" bring you legally into sonship so that your sins are forgiven, and you're given the full rights of a child in His family. No, in love, He wants to make that love real and alive to you, He wants you to experientially taste and enjoy your adoption. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to change our slavish fears toward God into confident, happy, peaceful affection for God.

This is the ministry of the Spirit: He pours God's love into our hearts (Romans 5:5, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us"), and we pour out our love for Him with the cry, "Abba, Father!" This word, Abba, is a remarkable

word. It is an Aramaic word, so it makes you wonder why Paul would use it in a pair of letters written to Greek-speakers?

The answer is that it was the way Jesus spoke to His Father, in spite of the fact that virtually no one in Jewish culture referred to God in such an intimate, familial way. In Mark 14:36, Jesus is in Gethsemane and prays, “*Abba, Father*, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.” So in adopting us, God gives us the very Spirit of His Son and grants us to draw near to God in the same affectionate way that Jesus Himself did. Nothing could demonstrate more powerfully that we are no longer slaves, but beloved sons. It was so stunning, and precious, that Paul chose to use the Aramaic word, as a reminder of the intimacy with God that is ours now because of Jesus.

And we *cry* Abba. This is a word of deep and profound passion and feeling. We don't say, or acknowledge, that God is Abba; we cry it. This is what the Spirit does in and for us. Paul didn't say that the testimony of the Spirit was that we affirm doctrinally that God is father. The devil knows that doctrine. Doctrinal affirmations, as important as they are, don't make children. What he said was that the testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children is that from our hearts there rises an irrepressible cry – a *cry*, not a mere statement, a *cry*: “Abba! Father!” Do you know this cry? Or do you live like an orphan?

...In the Midst of Painful Suffering

There's something else that's communicated with this word, Abba, which brings us right into the last part of the summary statement I mentioned at the beginning. I said that the Spirit confirms our adoption by stirring up family affection between the believer and God, in the midst of painful suffering on the way to our family inheritance:

*"¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,
¹⁷and 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."*

The Spirit of adoption confirms that we are heirs of God (!!!), but Paul is quick to clarify that sonship does not insulate you from suffering. It didn't insulate Jesus from suffering, and it won't insulate you.

Remember, Jesus' Abba cry was in Gethsemane, where He was screaming to His Father for deliverance, to the point that the veins in His temples burst into drops of blood (Luke 22:39-44). Most people don't mention this when they talk about Abba, but Russell Moore has said that the Abba cry is not so much the sound of a baby giggling into his father's face, but more the sound of a child screaming, "Daddy!" as a rabid bulldog is running at him in attack mode.

When I say the Spirit stirs up family affections for us toward God, we need not think that the only kind of affections He brings about are sweet, tender feelings. The Spirit groans within us. The Spirit leads us to see that we are in enemy-occupied territory, and He moves in us to rage against the pain and suffering we see around us, and experience ourselves. The Spirit leads us to cry out with the rest of creation, "O God, O Abba, deliver us from this! This is not how it's supposed to be!" (See 8:18-23). It's through this kind of praying that we know we have received the Spirit of adoption as sons.

And when we're in that kind of hardship, we need the Spirit's work confirming our inheritance as God's children that sustains us day by day: "¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷and if children, then heirs..." When the Spirit is at work confirming your adoption as sons, He will help you to see this life, with all its groanings and sorrows, as a journey on your way to receive a spectacular inheritance. Here's the way John Newton put it:

"Suppose a man was going to New York to take possession of a large estate, and his [carriage] should break down a mile before he got to the city, which obliged

him to walk the rest of the way; what a fool we should think him, if we saw him wringing his hands, and blubbering out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"

You've got an inheritance coming, and the resurrected body of Jesus Christ, enthroned at the right hand of God the Father this moment, and the Holy Spirit He has given you, is God's down payment of that coming reward. Can you see, and taste, that coming weight of glory? This is the Spirit's ministry in and for us. May you be filled with confidence that your hope will not put you to shame, because God's love has been poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit.