

Have We Left Him Room? Part 3
The Holy Spirit, Our Adopter and Advocate
Romans 8:14-17

We're continuing our series on the Holy Spirit – His life-giving presence in us; His indispensable work through us; and our crucial, continual call to be filled with this same Spirit of the Living God. Last week, we pondered the Holy Spirit as our *Sanctifier*. Today, we are going to highlight the Holy Spirit's work as *Adopter & Advocate*. We're going to look at how God *claims us, seals us, and incorporates us into his family – and he does so through the Holy Spirit.*

The waters of Baptism point to all these spiritual realities, a beautiful and powerful portrayal of God's grace poured out upon us. Whether we are looking back upon this grace offered in our own baptism or looking forward to witnessing such a joyous time in the lives of others. And just as the Spirit was present at Jesus' baptism, He is present at ours – confirming the same truth, instilling the Father's words: "*This is my child, whom I love.*" Gathering us and grafting us into the very family of God! And once again, we have the Holy Spirit to thank. [P]

Our passage in Romans reveals the wondrous truth: *Through the gift of faith, we have received the Spirit of adoption as children of God! This isn't simply spiritual sentiment – this is a change of status of eternal proportions! We have moved from a broken, rebellious relationship based on fear and slavery to a restored, rich relationship based on intimacy with the Father ...* Too many Christians are still living in fear of God, an unhealthy state of fear I mean, because they haven't accepted their status of "sonship."

I've spoken with people who grew up fearful of God because their early experience in the church conveyed God as perpetually angry. How tragic – not being able to rest in and enjoy the spirit of adoption God has provided for them. Are you enjoying that yourself today? Through your faith in Christ, the Spirit confirms it – you are a child of God!

I want you to see the ramifications of this ... Being a “child” of God means being an “heir” of God also (v. 17) – being an heir means BOTH you have a life to be grateful for right now, but also you must look to the future for the full enjoyment of all that's to come with your inheritance. You have security and joy, for today and for tomorrow! [P]

Next, as our Adopter, the Holy Spirit is not only instrumental in making us God's children; He also makes us aware that we are God's children. That's what Paul means when he says our spirit cries out “Abba, Father.” Paul is stressing that our awareness of God and being filled by God comes not from rational thought or from external testimony alone, but from a truth *deeply felt and intensely experienced* ...

Maybe you're hearing this and are thinking, “Well, I just DON'T experience that kind of intimacy with God! The Spirit in me never cries, ‘Abba, Father’”... First, let me say, I can understand that ... There have been multiple times in my life when I've asked God, “Why can't I *feel* you like it's described in the stories of the Bible ... Holy Spirit, why don't I sense you the way other Christians describe it?” I've had to be reminded many times that Jesus' main promises about the Spirit were not about what we'd *feel* ... in other words, just as the disciples had to put faith in Jesus when it was *hard* and *unclear* and *risky* ... that *remains* the kind of faith God desires from us with the Holy Spirit.

Let me put it this way: What God *clearly says* is more important than what we subjectively feel. Again and again in the Scriptures, we hear about being God's children, being led by His Spirit, and how we have received the Spirit of adoption ... God doesn't want us to doubt it for a second.

I want to tell you about a woman named Kristen. A few people watched her as she attended her mother's funeral. There was no doubt that Kristen was loved by this woman who had adopted her from Korea. She was Kristen's mother, not just some lady who looked after her and paid for her food. It's been years since her death, yet Kristen still has a hard time talking about her without getting emotional. She misses her Mom ... *This* is the type of adoption God speaks of in his Word. It's not about having an impersonal guardian who looks over you. It's about having a parent. The best parent there ever was or ever will be.

We have been chosen ... grafted ... adopted into the family of God. And now that we are a part of that family, the Spirit causes us to call out – sometimes quietly, sometimes with cries – “Abba! Father!” ... You've probably heard this before, but the word “Abba” was the most intimate form of referring to a father in the Aramaic language. It's like saying “Daddy” – it conveys a deep level of familiarity, intimacy & dependence. As God's Spirit speaks to our hearts, we can call out to God as our Abba. *This doesn't trivialize God's holiness; it's not a casual or flippant expression. On the contrary, it frames us in exactly the state of mind and heart where we can be most receptive to God ... where we can be most filled with the Spirit.* When our spiritual arms are lifted up to

our Abba – our hands raised, open and trusting and dependent – we can experience holy intimacy more deeply than we ever thought possible.

By the way, *Abba* is the term Jesus himself used in addressing his Father in the Gospel of Mark. Do you see what's so amazing about this?! Paul is showing us that Christians now – being united to Christ – have a relationship to God that is like Christ's own relationship to the Father – though of course not exactly like it. The point? God has taken *no* half measures! ... We have been made full members of the family! We are partakers of all the rights and privileges belonging to members of that family ... How will that affect your life, knowing that? [P]

I do have to point out something Paul says before moving on. Let me ask, when you're an heir to a royal dynasty ... is it all castles, swimming pools and horseback riding? ... No, right? Heavy is the head that wears the crown, they say. Paul doesn't sugarcoat it; he says that this glorious inheritance is attained only through suffering. Rom. 8:17 – “*We share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*” *Because we are one with Christ, we are fellow heirs, assured of being “glorified with him”... But at the same time, this oneness, this amazing oneness, means we must follow the path of Christ to glory – “suffering with him.”* [P]

Thankfully, that's another reason he gives us *the Holy Spirit ... as our Advocate.* An advocate is a defender, not only in the legal realm, but in other ways as well. The Spirit is there to give us aid against the challenges we face, including the suffering Paul has in mind here: daily struggles, tensions, and persecutions that are the lot of those who follow the Cross-Bearer. Participation in Christ's glory can come only through

participation in his suffering ... *This is the oneness we are promised, beautiful intimacy but amidst the messiness of the world.* [Pause]

I sometimes wondered what it would be like to have the kind of remarkable testimony I often hear about from people who were in the pit of life, but then experienced the most radical change when they encountered Christ! I was raised in a Christian home and came to know Jesus at a young age. After several years of walking with him, I began to turn, so slightly at first I didn't even recognize it. I quenched the conviction the Holy Spirit put in my heart, again and again. There were times I hated what I had done, and said, "That's it, last time," but it was only remorse not repentance ... Sometimes I waited days before talking to God, maybe because I was ashamed, but I think also to prove I could change and do it myself. But as Paul says in Romans 8, that is acting like *a slave* ... still surrounded by fear ... I figured I could still serve God somehow, even though I felt uncomfortable having a real conversation with Him. Have you ever felt that way? Do you ever distance yourself from the Father b/c of a certain sin that keeps snaring you?

I wanted God to see that I could be a good servant – like the prodigal who decided to go home, pleading to be a hired hand – then maybe I'd feel good enough to talk with God again ... *But God didn't want a good slave who tried really hard ... He wanted His son back ... and He wanted me to see that He is a good **Father**.* Simply put, He wants intimacy ... that's really the entire point of the Old and New Testaments ... *It's all about a personal God seeking to **create and cultivate** a never-ending relationship with a people all His own.* [P]

It takes faith to believe God is truly like the prodigal son's father, who from afar "saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Lk. 15:20). Lest there be any doubt, the father made it absolutely clear that his son was forgiven – he invited his wayward child back into his life without bitterness or requiring penance.

In the same way, the Spirit speaks this truth to our hearts. Take Rom. 8, for example – "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (v. 1); and "Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39). I love Romans 8! These are verses we could probably spout off, but often we need *reminding* of the power and veracity of them.

And as we will learn next week, it is the Spirit who *reminds* us just who we are in Christ – forgiven and set free ... but more than that – we are gathered in; we are made His children; and nothing can change that, nothing can separate us from God our Father and Christ our Savior. How do we know that for sure? [P] The Spirit, our Advocate, our Defender, presses the certainty of it in our hearts. *Our confidence, our assurance, of our Abba Father's love for us, and our precious relationship to Him, is so important! It not only informs us of who we are, it orients us and inspires us in how we are to live!* Yet another reason why we are to be continually *filled* with the Spirit!

In the book of Jeremiah, God said to Israel, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the LORD" (29:13).

When is the last time you sought after God as your Abba Father with *all your heart*? [P] God still desires to be sought and found by His people. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you

set everything else aside right now, so that you can seek the Lord wholeheartedly ... so you can cry “Abba, Father” ... Tell God that you want that intimacy with Him, no matter what. When our relationship with the Lover of our soul is as it should be, there is nothing more meaningful. Let us live joyfully and purposefully as the adopted children we are, in Christ and for Christ! Amen.