

Adoption

I'm A Child of the King

By **Dr. Derek Thomas**

Romans 8

Now turn with me if you would to the eighth chapter of Romans, Romans chapter 8. I want us in particular this evening to focus our thoughts, as we have been considering the doctrine of adoption. How God in His mercy and grace has brought us, as the children of wrath that we are by nature - for Jesus, you remember, says to the disciples at one point, "You are of your father, the Devil." - by nature, that's what we are, but by the grace of God we have been brought into a living and vital relationship with God, such that we may call Him "Abba, Father." And last week in particular, we examined together how in that relationship of adoption, we are also brought into a relationship with Jesus Christ, because in the process of adoption we are brought into a family, the family of God, in which Jesus is our elder brother. He is not ashamed to call us "brethren."

But now this evening, I want us to move on a little in our thoughts as we try to uncover what Scripture has to say about this wonderful truth; and to do so, asking the question: What is the relationship that we now bear as the children of God to the Holy Spirit? And, in a sense, the eighth chapter of Romans—as we shall see in a minute, at least to some extent—answers that question in a variety of ways. In fact, there's a sense in which Romans 8 is almost like looking through one of those kaleidoscopes. Young children, I don't even know whether they have them today, but when I was little you could look through one of these things and turn it around, and there were little glass beads inside there. And as you turned it around, it made different shapes and patterns and so on. Well, in a sense, Romans 8 is a little bit like that. I want us to pick up the reading, first of all, as we find it in verse 14 of Romans 8, although we are going to consider the whole of the eighth chapter of Romans—and there's a challenge. But let's pick it up first of all in verse 14.

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

And then if we drop down to verse 26:

In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Amen. May God add His blessing to the reading of His holy and inerrant word.

In verses 15 and 16, but in verse 15 in particular, we have this little expression, “the spirit of adoption,” “the spirit of adoption.” And there is a sense for the Apostle Paul that everything that we have been considering together about adoption is as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit, that without the work of the Holy Spirit we would not be the children of God. This little phrase “the spirit of adoption,” or “the spirit of sonship,” actually only occurs here in the New Testament. And it's part of, as I suggested earlier, it's part of a complex of things that the Apostle Paul is enumerating for us as he expands our relationship to Jesus Christ and all of the consequences that flow from that relationship.

He begins by telling us in verse 9 that those who do not have the Spirit of God, do not belong to Jesus Christ, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” And one of the consequences of our regeneration, as we are brought by faith and repentance into a living and vital relationship with Jesus Christ, we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit—that the Holy Spirit comes and makes us His home. That we are, in Paul's language elsewhere, the “temples” of the Holy Spirit.” So that as we live out our lives, you and I as Christians, we do so bearing in a sense within us the Holy Spirit of God. And this Spirit—and isn't it interesting? At least I find it interesting that Paul refers to the Spirit there in verse 9 not only as the “Spirit of God,” but also as the “Spirit of Christ.” And that the Holy Spirit proceeds not only from God the Father, but also proceeds from Jesus Christ Himself. And there is a wonderful sense now, do you understand, that the entirety of the Trinity—God the Father and God the Son and God the Holy Spirit—are intimately involved in bringing us home.

Now, there is almost a systematic treatment of the Holy Spirit here in Romans chapter 8, and I want us to look at it from a bird's eye view, you understand. We don't have time to be in Romans 8 for more than 25 minutes here, but let me say six things. Let me say six things that Paul is enumerating for us in answer to the question:

I. What is my relationship to the Holy Spirit as a child of God.

What is my relationship to the Holy Spirit as a child of God? Or to ask the

question in a different way: What does the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within my heart bring about? And Paul answers that by saying to us, first of all, that the Holy Spirit brings us into the blessings of the New Covenant. Now, you need to go back to the beginning of Romans 8 and try and pick up what he's saying in verse 3. And in verse 3, he's talking about the Law. And when Paul talks about the Law he can mean many different things. But more often than not, when he's talking about the Law in a general sense, he's talking about that dispensation prior to the coming of Christ when men and women were living under the dictates of not just the moral law, but all of the Law that emerged on Mount Sinai—the ceremonial law and the civil law. And Paul is saying in verse 3, “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

And do you see there's a sense in which Paul is saying, “There's something about the Old Covenant. There's something about that period of time before Jesus Christ came that was wholly inadequate.” He's not saying that there weren't any people saved before Jesus came. Of course there were. But they were always living under a cloud; they were always living, as it were, under a veil. And only when Jesus Christ came was that veil taken away.

And notice how he goes on. He goes on in verse 4 to say, “in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit,” the Holy Spirit. And there's a sense now in the New Covenant, as the Holy Spirit has been poured forth in all of His fullness on the day of Pentecost, there's something now that is a contrast with the person who lived and dwelt under the Old Covenant. There's a sense in which the Holy Spirit enables us to do the very thing which under the Law in the Old Testament they were not able to do.

Now there's more to what I'm saying, and Paul elaborates on that thought in many different places in Corinthians and Galatians and elsewhere. But he wants us to see that when he talks about the Holy Spirit, he wants us to understand there's something deeply, deeply significant about the very fact that he's talking about the Holy Spirit at all—that you and I are living in New Covenant days. We're not living in the Old Testament. It would be interesting to go back to the days of Moses; it would be interesting to be on Mount Sinai; it would be interesting to see the battle of Elijah with the prophets of Baal. I'd love to ask a question or two of Amos. But I'm so glad that I live on this side of Pentecost, that I live in the days when Jesus has come, and Jesus has died, and Jesus has risen, and Jesus has ascended, and Jesus has sent forth His representative agent, namely the Holy Spirit, to dwell within our hearts. So that's the first thing that Paul is saying, and he's saying it in a very general way: that the Holy Spirit brings us into the blessing of the New Covenant.

II. The Holy Spirit witnesses to our sonship.

But secondly, and more particularly, he tells us in verses 14-17 that the Holy Spirit witnesses to our sonship. Now notice what he says in verse 16: "The Spirit Himself." And if you're reading in the old King James version, it was a very naughty translation to say "the Holy Spirit *itself*." It's "the Holy Spirit *Himself* bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God."

Now notice several things about what Paul is saying here. He's saying that this is not an independent witness; He bears witness with our spirits. There's a relationship that Paul is talking about here of the Holy Spirit and our spirit, there's a communion. There's a sense in which we are conscious of His activity within us. Paul is using first of all, I think, the language of the law courts. He's probably alluding to Deuteronomy 19. And do you remember that for something to be valid it had to be witnessed to by two or three witnesses? And Paul is alluding to that here. I know that I'm a Christian tonight not because I say so, but I have another witness who will stand in court and will answer the charge that may well be put to me. And do you remember at the end of Romans 8 Paul actually raises that very thing? "Who shall lay any *charge* against God's elect?" I think Paul has in mind, of course, Satan. He has in mind, I think, the Accuser of the brethren and the answer to the accusations of Satan as he whispers in your ears, child of God, resting as you are in the finished work of Jesus Christ. The answer to the charge of Satan is the Holy Spirit who testifies with my spirit that I am a child of God and an heir of God and a joint-heir with Jesus Christ. And the way the Holy Spirit witnesses—and there's been some debate about this down through the centuries as to whether that witness is immediate witness or an in-mediate witness. And the answer of the majority I have to say is—at least within our sort of circles, you understand—that the Spirit witnesses through means: through reading your Bible, through gathering together as the Lord's people on a Wednesday night and a Sunday, through listening to the word of God as it is proclaimed and explained. And through these means of grace, the Spirit witnesses with our spirits.

But notice how he puts it in verse 15: "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!'" Now I want to, if you have your Bibles before you this evening—and if you don't, I want to ask why you don't have your Bible before you - so, while you're looking for someone else's Bible, I want you to open to Galatians 4:6. We've looked at this passage a few weeks ago, because there's somewhat of a tension between what Paul is saying here in Romans 8:15 and what Paul is saying in Galatians 4:6. In both of those verses do you see that he's referring to the work of the Holy Spirit, and he's referring to this cry that we make, "Abba, Father!" Here in Romans 8:15 it is we who cry "Abba, Father!" But in Galatians 5:6 it's the Holy Spirit who cries "Abba, Father!" Do you see something of that tension? Is it *me* that cries "Abba, Father" or is it the *Holy Spirit* that cries "Abba, Father"? And the answer is that it is both. The answer is that the Holy Spirit as He witnesses to us enables us to cry as He cries with us "Abba, Father!"

Do you understand what that actually means? You know, at the bottom line what that actually means is, and Paul is using here—and it's not the vocable; it's not the words "Abba, Father" that are important—it's the verb "to cry." And Paul is using a word that has about it a terribly wrought emotional cry. It's the verse that would be used, for example, of blind Bartimaeus. You remember blind Bartimaeus' cry, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"? Now, Bartimaeus was blind, and the only answer to his blindness was passing him by, and he cries out, "Son of David! Have mercy on me!" This is also the verb that the New Testament implies for the cry of Jesus from the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And Paul is giving us a clue here that sometimes we experience that ministry of the Spirit, not so much at the height of our spiritual experience, but actually when we're in the very depths itself, when we're at the end of our tether, and all we can do is cry. It's the thought of a young boy who has fallen on the road and bloodied his knees, and he looks up into the eyes of his father and he blurts out, "Father! Help me!" And at that moment and in that very cry itself, Paul is saying, "That's the Holy Spirit." When you have no one else to turn to, and you turn to God your Father in heaven, it's the Spirit, and it's the witness of the Spirit, and it's the ministry of the Spirit, because that's what He delights to do.

III. The Holy Spirit brings us into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ.

But there's a third thing I want us to see. The Holy Spirit brings us into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. We're brought by the Holy Spirit into a condition of conflict, and, in particular, a conflict between the flesh on the one hand and the Spirit on the other. Now Paul worked this out in a number of ways here in Romans 8, and you're familiar, of course, with verse 13. "For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit"—and note the Spirit in verse 13.—"if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." And one of the things, the consequences of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within our hearts is that we're brought into conflict with indwelling sin.

I never knew certain sins until the Holy Spirit came. I was happy doing the things I was doing and thinking the things that I was thinking until the Holy Spirit came. And the Holy Spirit came into this house and, well, like a good wife often has to change the terrible habits of a young husband and say, "This can't go on anymore. And you can't leave your dirty laundry on the floor of the bathroom anymore, however much you protest that this is what you've done for twenty years." And when the Holy Spirit comes, do you see, into a spirit of tension with indwelling sin?

But not only that. If you, for example, go down to verses 19 and 20: "I consider," verse 18, "that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And he goes on to speak of living in this world, groaning and travailing because this world is under the curse, and it's

longing for the regeneration of all things. And one of the consequences of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit is that He gives us a longing for a different world.

Sometimes, you know, when life is hard and tough and sufferings come and trials come, you find yourself longing to be out of it and longing to be in that eternal city and longing to be in that place where there is no pain and there is no death and there are no tears and there are no partings and there are no sorrows: a new heavens and a new earth. And Paul is referring to it about “the creation being subject to futility not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it in hope.” And he is saying that likewise in ourselves, one of the consequences of the Holy Spirit is He brings us into union with Jesus Christ. And bringing us into union with Jesus Christ involves bringing us into union with His sufferings.

Do you see how that trajectory begins to unfold in verse 17 in a very graphic and particular way? Because just when you’re thinking how wonderful it is to be a child of God, “I’m a child of King. I’m a child of the King. With Jesus my Savior, I’m the child of a King,” and then you read verse 17, “And if children, heirs”—how wonderful!—“heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ”—how even more wonderful!—“if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.” And you see, for the Apostle Paul there is no escaping it, that the only road to glory is via the pathway of suffering. And it’s not that one follows the other, but for the Apostle Paul, our union and fellowship with Jesus Christ inevitably involves suffering and trial and difficulty as we live in this fallen world.

IV. The Holy Spirit helps us in our praying.

But the fourth thing, the Holy Spirit helps us in our praying, “In the same way,” verse 26, “the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” Paul actually invents a word here. Yes, he actually invents a word; he concocts a word from out of nothing. He uses actually three words and he meshes them altogether—a bit like what happens in German. He uses a prefix which means “to act along with,” and then he sticks that on to a preposition which actually means “substitution, instead of”: the Spirit acts along with us and instead of us and He enables us by His power to bear and carry and bring our prayers to God. And you’re asking Paul, “What on earth do you mean?” And Paul is saying, “Well, you see, it’s always like that. It’s always like that.”

I remember when I was moving into Cam's Hill Park in Belfast. It was up a fairly steep hill, and the house itself was on a little hill. And you went up the driveway, and then there were several steps. And you had to turn ‘round the steps and into the front door... and we had just been given this upright piano. And it belonged to a lady in the church, and she was then in her 80s, and she's still alive, and she's 101 today. And there was no way that I could say, “I don't want this thing. It's too old. It's too heavy. No thank you.” I had to have it! And Ellen was a little girl, and

she wanted the piano, and there were six of us: five deacons and myself. And I had a hold of that piano, and if you asked me honestly, down to my very roots, “Was I carrying that piano?” I would've said, “Yes, I was.” But in reality, in comparison to the strength of these other deacons actually I wasn't doing anything at all. And I think if I'd have let the piano go it would've gotten in, in exactly the same way. And sometimes our praying is like that. “I don't know what to say. I can't think straight anymore. It's too complicated. It's too confusing. It's such a mess. I'm so filled with unbelief. I sometimes think it cannot change; it'll always be like this!” And I come before God and all I can do is sigh and groan. And it's the Holy Spirit who makes sounds that are inexpressible and sometimes inaudible. And through the mighty intercession of Jesus Christ, the Spirit lifts that prayer into the very arms of Jesus. And Jesus on the power of His shed blood brings them to His Father in heaven.

V. The consequence of our adoption.

But there's more, because there's a consequence of your adoption. Verse 28: “And we know that God cause all things to work together for good...” And I know it says “God causes all things to work together for good,” but I am absolutely persuaded that in the context of Romans 8, Paul actually means “God *the Holy Spirit*.” God the Holy Spirit so orders your life and the exigencies of life and all of the forces of life; in His marvelous and intricate providence He orders it for good. The world may mean it for evil, but as Joseph said to his brothers, “God means it for good.” And how marvelous here at the end of Romans 8...and we can only, as it were, open the cupboard door and just glimpse inside and see something that is far greater than we can ever imagine: God is working out His goal and purpose to bring you home! And every detail and every eventuality and every circumstance and every trial and every hurt and every difficulty and every pain and every sorrow—is part of the unfolding of that marvelous providence of God which by the Holy Spirit is weaved towards that grand *telos* and goal to bring you and me home to heaven and to God.

VI. How the Holy Spirit helps us in trials.

But there's one final thing that Paul wants us to see. As he unfolds the intricate argument of this closing of chapter 8, what exactly does the Holy Spirit do when we find ourselves in the midst of trial, and as we find ourselves as a consequence of our union with Jesus Christ in the midst of suffering? And notice what he says in verse 32: “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?” Now don't interpret that as though Paul is saying that if you look to Jesus, He'll give you a car and a house and a mansion and a checkbook and everything else—that's not what He's saying. The “all things” are the “all things” of verse 28: that “God causes *all things* to work together for good.” And part of those “all things” are the

trials and the sufferings and the pain and the hurt. And God will even give you those things...but do you know what He gives you in return? He gives you a glimpse of Jesus and His finished work, because that at the end of the day is the glorious ministry of the Holy Spirit. "He is the One who will bear witness of Me," Jesus said. He is Jesus' representative agent here on Earth, to cause us and move us to glimpse Jesus and His finished work, to be able to say "How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear. It calms his sorrows and heals his wounds, and drives away his fear." That's what the Holy Spirit does.

At the end of the day when you find yourselves in the midst of horrendous trials, child of God, He says to you, He whispers in your ear, "He that spared not His own Son." You know, He spared Abraham's only son; He spared Isaac. In the Bible translation that Paul would've been using of the Old Testament, the Greek Septuagint, that's the very expression that he would've read in Genesis: that God had "spared" Isaac. But He didn't spare His own son...for you...for you, child of God...and for me. "How shall He not then along with Him freely give us all things? Shall anyone lay a charge against God's elect? Shall anyone separate you from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ our Lord?" And Paul will bring it to its crescendo, "that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities...nor height, nor depth, nor anything in all of creation..." "nor anything in all of creation can separate (me) from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Do you remember Spurgeon's sermon title on that passage? "There's No Stopping this God." There's no stopping this God.

Amen.

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