

## **Our Adoptive Father**

January 24, 2010 - Romans 8:12-17

Imagine that you lived in a country ruled by an oppressive tyrant. He suspected everyone of everything. You're 10 years old and live a peaceful life in the country with your parents. But one night you hear several military vehicles driving onto your land. A loud knock echoes through the house. Your father opens the door only to have several soldiers burst in. They arrest your father and mother, putting them in one truck. They take you to another truck filled with other children. You wave to your parents wondering if you will ever see them again.

They transport you to an old hospital where hundreds of children now stay. They have lost their parents just like you. Years go by. Bitterness and anger takes root in you because of this life change forced upon you. You're now 15 and quite sure you'll never see your parents again. You have managed to survive in this horrid place. But you long for escape to a family life like you once had. It seems like a far fetched dream.

But one day news breaks that the evil king has been overthrown. The country endures chaos for awhile until a new leader emerges. He is the wealthiest and kindest man in the nation. You and the others start asking about your parents. But a representative from the new government comes to sadly inform you and all in that place that your parents were killed. You must stay at the orphanage until further developments. A collective depression settles in with this news.

It lasts several days until the new leader informs your warden that He wants to visit the orphanage. He comes the next week to tour the many wards and greet the children. Word spreads that He desires take some back with Him to His estate in the country. You're certain He won't pick you. In fact, just that day, you got in a fight with another teenager. You look scruffy and your eye blackens from a punch. You're sure He'll notice other children and not you.

He comes to your ward. He visits with the outgoing kids. He greets almost everyone in the room. He notices you sitting on your bed in the corner kind of looking away. He comes over to your bed. "Hello," he says. You can't help but notice the kindness in His eyes and smile. They are so inviting. "You're getting quite a shiner there!" Rats. He noticed the black eye. You'll never make it. You know it.

You say nothing. He continues on to another ward.

The next day there is a great buzz in the cafeteria. The warden posts a list of the children selected by the kind, wealthy gentleman to come live with him. You can't bear to look but you have to look. So after the crowd lessens, you push your way through to the front. Two full pages bear the names of children invited to join Him. You're not on the first page. You get to the second page and run your finger down the first column. Nothing close to your name there. Second column. Last chance. At the second name from the bottom, your finger stops. It's your name. You look around as if there's been a mistake. But there's no mistake. You're on the list! The bottom of the list instructs all named children to pack their things and be ready for pick up after breakfast.

The next day, you say your goodbyes and stand with the others in front of the old hospital. A beautiful bus drives up. A representative of the man reads off the names one by one. You're the second last one called but you wait patiently. When you respond to your name, he smiles and gives you your seat assignment.

You experience a breathtaking journey into the country. You'd forgotten its beauty. There's a collective gasp as you first see the grounds, the open fields and the massive house where you'll live. You're certain He just wants more servants to help keep up the grounds. But you don't mind. Anything is better than that old hospital serving as an orphanage.

The guide directs you into the house where you're given a beautiful room. It's larger than the entire home you used to live in on the farm. There is so much to do and it's beautifully decorated. But before you have much time to take it in, you become aware of someone in the room with you. It's Him.

"Hello again," he says. "How's that shiner?"

"Getting better," you respond. Then you thank him for bringing you there. And you ask "What do you want me to do?"

"Actually," he says, "what I want you to do is not as important as who I want you to be."

"What do you mean?" you ask.

"I want you to be part of my family. In fact, I'm ready to sign the adoption papers if you agree. Not only do I want you as a child, I have a wonderful inheritance I want to share with you and all my other children."

You're speechless. You could not have imagined something like this. He goes on. "I will provide for you and be there for you. All I ask is that you embrace your status as my child and start living with all I will provide for you. There are some tough assignments out there. But I will be with you through it all. Then I have marvelous things I want you to be part of that we'll enjoy here forever. Will you become my child?"

Does that sound like a far fetched dream? On the one hand, I did ask you to *imagine* yourself in this story. But on the other hand, if you're a Christian, this story is already true of you and me.

**Our Father adopted us. We must adopt our new status as His children.** Today we're going to step out of that story into the reality of relating to Our Adoptive Heavenly Father.

Since Our Father adopted us, we must adopt our new status as His children. Now when I make that statement, I am using the word "adopt" in two different ways. "Our Father adopted us" means God is like an adoptive parent. So adopt means "to take into one's family through legal means and bring up as one's own child." The second use of adopt means "to take on or assume." So since Our Father adopted us, (took us into His family as His own children), we must adopt, take on, or assume our new status as His children. We are going to explore what that looks like today.

Last week, we saw the apostle Paul declare "there is therefore now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." We saw Him give reasons why there is now no condemnation. One reason was the Holy Spirit in our lives. His indwelling in us proves we are in Christ and under no legal condemnation from God. Then we saw Paul call for a response to this gift of no condemnation "For if you live according to the sinful nature you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the sinful nature, you will live."

From that statement Paul describes another amazing revelation about what God has done and provided for His children. It comes together to further assure us Christians that we really are under no condemnation. It also shows us the resources God provides to live the Christian life.

Today, I want you to see what Our Father is like through His actions and provisions. If you don't know our Father, my hope is you see more clearly who He is. Then we will see how to adopt our status as His children.

Romans 8:12-17 (ESV)

## Heirs with Christ

12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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!” 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and 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.

## What has Our Father done?

**He adopted us.** (8:15) He gave us the Spirit of adoption instead of the spirit of slavery. He brought us into His family as His children. 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!”

Before we came to Christ, we have the spirit of slavery. We were owned by a cruel “lord” named sin. In Roman society, the lord had absolute power to do with the slave whatever he pleased. Slaves adopted servile spirits to survive. Servile means “too obedient; too willing to agree with somebody or do anything however demeaning, that somebody wants.” Slaves adopted this spirit to survive and lived an existence of insecurity and terror. If the lord woke up one morning in a bad mood, the slave might be whipped or killed or sold. Before we came to Christ we were slaves to that terrible lord sin. We have seen that throughout Romans. Sin was our master. Indwelling sin ruled over us. We were born in the slums ruled by the task master sin. We lived with the insecurity of wondering if our good works outweighed the bad.

But when we come to Christ we receive the Spirit of sonship or adoption. We are given the privilege of becoming children of a good and caring father. In Paul’s world, adoption most often occurred among wealthy childless couples. They would search for young men of good character to become heirs and maintain the family name.

One commentator points out the twist Paul achieves in using the word adoption. *In Paul’s world, adoption was ordinarily of young adult males of good character to become heirs and maintain the family name for rich people who otherwise had no children. Paul, however, proclaims God’s gracious adoption of person’s of bad character to become “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.”*

This adoption occurred the moment we received Christ. So many blessings poured into our lives at that time. We were justified or given right standing before God. That's Romans 3:24. We were regenerated and given a new moral nature. We are adopted to become children of our Heavenly Father.

That happens when we receive Christ. Remember John 1:12 that was part of our Christmas series according to John? The hostile world did not know or receive Jesus the Light. But "to all who did receive him, who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood, not of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man but of God."

Christian, you are an adopted son or daughter of Your Heavenly Father.

Now I don't know what it's like to be adopted or adopt a child. But through my years of observing, talking and knowing people on both sides of the relationship, it seems very special most of the time. I've read a little about some of the struggles adopted children may go through with respect to their biological parents. Some wonder why they were given up. But there also seems to be a special bond with parents who took them in and raise them as their own.

You adoptive parents have a greater sense of what God must feel towards each and every one of His children. Sure, there are disappointments and challenges. But to make the decision to bring someone into your family from outside is a tremendous act of love. That is what God has done for each of us.

So adopted children of the heavenly Father, rejoice today in this great act of love He has shown you. But His Fatherly commitment to us did not end at the moment of adoption. He has provided many resources for us to live as His children.

### **What has Our Father provided for His children?**

*He provided the Holy Spirit to lead us as the children of God.* (8:14). He gave the Spirit of Himself to show us the way. Verse 14 again – "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons or children of God." The For means there's some connection to what came before. The NIV makes this a little clearer by linking 13 & 14 into one sentence. "If by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live because those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God."

So let's see if we can get this connection. Christians are people who by the Holy Spirit put to death the acts of their sinful nature. When we partner with the Holy Spirit to do that, we are being led by the Spirit. Those led by the Spirit are the children of God. So Our Father provided the Holy Spirit to lead us as the children of God for holiness.

This was quite a discovery for me this week. Some of you know that one of my aims and hopes for 2010 is to be more led by the Holy Spirit this year. I want to be more sensitive than I am to His leading in my life and the church's direction. When we think of leading, don't we often think of our life direction or next steps?

The Holy Spirit can give next step direction. He did that with the missionaries in Acts when He prevented them from going into a certain region so He could direct them to Europe. Acts 16:6 and 7 – “Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia *having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia*. When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, *but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to.*” That night, Paul has this vision of a man from Europe calling them to come over. So the Holy Spirit can lead us in life direction.

But here in Romans 8, we see a different way the Spirit leads. “If by the Spirit, you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live because those led by the Spirit (in growing in holiness) are the children of God.” If you are growing in holiness and leaving behind those acts of the sinful nature, you are following the Holy Spirit's leadership. Our Father has provided Him to enable, empower and lead us in ever increasing holy living. But Our Father's provisions don't end with the Spirit's leading.

*Our Father provides the Holy Spirit through whom we get God's personal cell number.* God provides the Spirit by whom we pray “Abba, Father.” God gives the Spirit for intimate connection to Him. Verse 15 again. “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!*”

Now at first we might wonder, “How does that Swedish rock group ABBA keep getting in the Bible? Why do we have to pray to Abba and then the Father? But Abba is in fact the Aramaic name for Dad or Daddy. Jesus and the disciples spoke Aramaic, the common language in Palestine at that time. Hebrew was used by

the scholars, scribes and priests who could read. Aramaic was the everyday language. Kids would call out to their daddy's "Abba."

Because we are God's kids, by the Spirit we can call Him Abba, Dad, when we need help. It's like God has given us His personal cell phone number. You know how that works. There is the office number where you may or may not get a hold of the Dad. But hopefully most dads provide their kids with a code or their personal cell number so they can reach him in a time of need. That's what God does through the Spirit. We can address our Father with an intimate name with the Spirit's help.

Abba is the same name Jesus used to cry out to the Father in the garden of Gethsemane. In His great agony, Jesus cries (Mark 14:36) – "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." Jesus spoke to God as a toddler would first speak to his father, "papa, dada."

Friends, we need to call God's cell regularly. Are you crying out to Him with the pain of your soul or the questions in your life? You are no bother to Him. He has this amazing capacity to handle 24 million cell phone calls every second. So by the Holy Spirit, cry out to Papa, your Father in heaven. But Our Father's provision doesn't end there. What else does our Father provide for His children?

*He provides the Spirit to testify in our spirits that we are children of God.* The Holy Spirit speaks the truth in our spirits about our child/parent relationship with the Father. Verse 16 – "The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children." Now why would we need the Spirit to testify in our spirit that we are God's children? Perhaps it's for times when Satan whispers to us that God has forgotten us. Satan tries to seed doubt about God's character or real motives. Remember what He said to Eve in the garden? "Did God really say you must not eat of any tree in the garden?" He might whisper to us "God has forgotten you. You're not really His child. Some kind of Father to allow you to go through what you're going through." The Holy Spirit responds with a true testimony. "You are a child of God. You are the heavenly Father's adopted son or daughter."

John Piper points out another possibility why God provides the Spirit to testify in our spirits. "The Spirit awakens our child like affection for our Father. We don't *infer* logically the fatherhood of God from the

testimony of the Spirit. We *enjoy* emotionally the Fatherhood of God by the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not a premise from which we *deduce* that we are children of God; it is a power by which we *delight* in being the children of God.” In other words; you’re God’s child. Enjoy it! Embrace it! Embrace Him!

After all, we were once enemies of God. We were under His judgment and wrath. He had to rescue us. It’s not like we earned His favor or forced Him to save us. We’re like the prodigal or lost son who wasted his father’s inheritance on wild living. So when we come back, we don’t feel like engaging God as our Father. We just want to be His slaves and hope He’ll let us stay around. But we did not receive a spirit that makes us a slave to fear. God gave us the spirit of sonship and daughtership. His Spirit testifies we are His children.

The last provision our Father gives in this passage is found in verse 17. *He made us heirs with Christ of an eternal inheritance.* (8:17) I’m not going to spend time on this today because it leads into next week’s message. But notice Paul draws to our attention the logical conclusion. Since you are a child of God, you are also an heir of your Father God. Yes Christ is the natural heir. But you are one of millions of adopted children who become a co-heir with Christ. We’ll see much more of this inheritance next week.

So we’ve seen what our Father has done – He’s adopted us as His children. We’ve seen the provisions He’s given for His children through the Holy Spirit.

### **So how do we adopt our status as children?**

We need to make use of these provisions and live by them. Seek the leading of the Spirit of God. Seek the Spirit’s leading in your business, job, work, school, relationship and life. Follow Him to ever increasing holiness. Embrace your identity as adopted child of God. Cry “*Abba, Father*” in my prayers. Cry out to your “Loving Dad.” Turn to the Holy Spirit’s testimony for confirmation that you are God’s child when Satan whispers “God’s forgotten; God is bad; God is doubtful. And when you hesitate to approach God, listen to the Spirit’s testimony within who nudges you forward to approach your Dad. ”

Recognize you’re a co-heir with Christ looking for an eternal inheritance which is more important than any earthly inheritance. Invest in that which will last for eternity; that eternal inheritance: loving God, loving people; spreading His Gospel.

Share in Christ's sufferings in dependence on our Father's provisions. That's the last half of verse 17. "We are co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Sharing his sufferings means sharing the kind of sufferings He experienced. Jesus said "to take up your cross and follow me." There will be more on that next week as well.

One final way to adopt our status as God's child is to *consider our relationship with our fathers*. We must put that relationship in a healthy context so it does not hinder our relationship with our heavenly Father. If you had or have a negative or non-existent relationship with your father – don't let that cloud your relationship with your heavenly father. Don't conclude the heavenly Father is like that. Find out who He really is through His book. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal clearly the Father's character.

If you had or have a positive relationship with your father, praise God especially if your Dad showed you some of this God-like love. Yet we all know our fathers weren't perfect. Don't project that imperfection onto God. Our Heavenly Father has no flaws or imperfections.

Fathers, show your children a glimpse of God in you by passing on Godly leading, treating each child as a special wanted member of your family, be there for their crying out moments to talk; testify to them that they are your children and an honor to have in your life; show them the way of embracing Christ's sufferings to share in his future glory.

**If God is not your Father:** – an adoption can happen this morning, you can come to Him through His Son Jesus. You must first believe that Jesus is in fact God the Son. Then you must put your complete trust into Jesus. Then receive Him into your life as your only hope from the penalty of your sins. When you believe in Him, receive Him, repent and confess your sins, He will come in. God will immediately adopt you; you will be given the Holy Spirit to lead you and testify in your spirit, He will reserve an eternal inheritance for you. But it starts by calling out to Our Father by trusting in His Son.

We started with a story of adoption in our imaginations. Now we see the reality of our adoption by our heavenly Father. Let us come to Abba Father now to hear from Him and talk with Him.

For Further Study/Discussion:

1. In what ways might your relationship with your earthly father impact your view of God?
2. Why do you think God chose to reveal Himself as a Father?
3. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit (8:14)? What has that looked like in your life?
4. What stories have you heard or experienced regarding adoption?
5. How does the fact that you're adopted by God impact your view of Him?
6. Other Questions/Thoughts