

## **“Ruach Testifies”**

### **Romans 8:15-17**

~ Delivered at DHBC on March 2, 2014 (Soli Deo Gloria)

#### **INTRODUCTION**

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Please open your Bibles to Romans 8. **READ 12-17.**
- We knew it would be a hard moment but the look Heather and I shared across the room revealed our anxiety. It was one year ago. We were in Kunming, China to adopt our son Joshua. The orphanage workers had just handed him to Heather. Immediately he screamed and pushed away from her. We spent our first fifteen minutes sitting near him but not touching him as we tried to calm him down.
  - Once the forms were completed we drove back to our hotel. I wanted a picture of us so I picked up Josh only to have him immediately hit me in the face. Check out this hilarious picture. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
    - Josh’s reactions were understandable. He was taken out of his orphanage, which was likely the only place he had ever been. He was given to white people who spoke a language he had never heard, put in cars, put on an airplanes, given western food that feels and tastes different, put in a new house, and suddenly given 3 siblings. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
- This first year has been one of transition. Josh has to learn to put his old life behind him. He is no longer an orphan. He is our son. But he has to learn how to live this out. He has to learn for instance to trust our love for him. This has been perhaps the most difficult thing. He has completed accepted Heather but from the beginning he has for the most not wanted much to do with me.
  - Again, this is understandable for he can only take on so much. It is difficult though. As his father I want to hug him, kiss him, show him how much fun we can have with tickles and wrestling. For many months he would just cry and pull away if I tried anything.
    - In the last month or so things have begun to turn a corner. In fact, for the first time this past week he initiated a big hug with me. Josh is learning to put his old life behind him.
- This is a wonderful picture of the Christian life. Last week we saw that although human beings were slaves to sin, Jesus defeated sin and freed us. Paul then argued that since we are free we must not go back to that old way of life. We have no obligation to it. Rather, as he says in verse 13, we must **“by the Spirit put to death the misdeeds of the body.”**
  - We grow as Christians then by learning to become who we already are. The reason why we as Christians often do not live as we should is because we have either never really learned who we are, we have temporarily forgotten who we are, or we simply choose to go against who we are.
    - In our passage today Paul continues to call us to turn away from that old life of sin because of the Holy Spirit’s role in God’s adoption of us. To enable this Paul will talk about the fact of adoption, the experience of adoption, and the future of adoption.

## THE FACT OF OUR ADOPTION

- I put the first point like this then. **(SHOW SLIDE)** We must turn away from our old ways of sin because of the fact of our adoption. We are no longer slaves to sin. We are sons and daughters of God. Paul is saying that since you have this new status you should not go back to living like you once did when you were a slave.
  - Look at verse 15. **READ 15** – *“For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship.”*
- Before we can really understand this we need to make two quick parenthetical comments.
  - Comment #1: notice that the word “sonship” has a footnote. Your footnote will say “adoption.” They both mean the same thing.
  - Comment #2: why, as my 9 year old daughter Emily often asks, does it not say daughtership? Is Paul sexist? The answer is no. What you need to understand is that adoption in the ancient world was not exactly the same as today. Generally speaking adoption occurred when a father did not have an heir. Since only sons were heirs, the father could legally adopt a son who would become his heir.
    - So Paul is borrowing the imagery of adoption from his culture but he is clearly applying it to all believers whether men or women.
- Now come back to the passage. Remember, what Paul is seeking to do is help us put to death that old life of sin. The first way that he does this is to remind us of who the Holy Spirit has made us to be. And who has the Spirit made us to be? The adopted children of God. The Holy Spirit applies what Jesus has done for us. He is therefore called the *“Spirit of adoption.”* John Calvin went so far as to say that the first title of the Holy Spirit should be *“the Adopter.”*<sup>1</sup>
  - This Paul says is in direct contrast with our old life, which was one of slavery. So Paul is saying, *“Christian, you are no longer a slave. The spirit that is in you is not one of slavery to fear. The Spirit that is in you is one of adoption.”*
    - **(SHOW SLIDE)** The way to fight sin is to continually call to mind your new status as an adopted child. You are often tempted to go back to your old ways, to your old behaviours. But that is not who you now are. Jesus rescued you from slavery and the Holy Spirit adopted you so live out your new identity. *“My chains fell off/my heart was free/I rose went forth/and followed thee.”*
- This is what Josh is learning. For the past year Josh has woken up between 2-8 times a night. For the first six months it was with blood curdling screams. Something about his old life in the orphanage still affects him. What he is learning day-by-day is that he does not have to fear. His old life is gone forever.
  - This is all based on the legal fact of his adoption.
- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Eleven months ago Heather and I sat in this government office in Kunming, China. This document was placed in front of us by the officials. **(SHOW SLIDE)** That first question asks, *“Are you willing to adopt this child.”* I wrote, *“Yes.”* The next question asks if I promise to care for this child. I wrote,

<sup>1</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.1.3, 540-541.

“Yes.” We then handed over a lot of money to the government and the orphanage.

- We were then given this notarized document which states in part, **(SHOW SLIDE)** *“This is to certify that Barton Priebe and Heather Priebe have reached an agreement to adopt Liao Yu...the adoptive relationship takes effect March 26, 2013. Barton Priebe is now Liao Yu’s adopted father and Heather Priebe is now Liao Yu’s adoptive mother.”*
  - On that day Joshua Liao Yu legally became our son. **(SHOW SLIDE)**
- Friends, do you want to overcome those old behaviours in your life? **(SHOW SLIDE)** Those sins that drag you down? That jealousy that destroys relationships? That anger that consumes you and everyone else in its flames? That lust that dehumanizes the opposite sex and enslaves you?
  - Then Paul says the way you start putting it to death is to continually remind yourselves who you really are. Say, *“I am not longer a slave to this sin. Jesus freed me by his death and resurrection. I have the Spirit of adoption. I am a new creation Christ Jesus. The old is gone the new has come.”*
    - Turn away from your old ways of sin because of the fact of your adoption. You have a new legal status.

## THE EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Second, we must turn away from our old ways of sin because of the experience of our adoption.
  - This is one of my favourite parts of the Bible. For here we see that Christianity is not merely the belief of certain doctrines. Oh yes, we must learn about our new legal status. But Christianity is not just a matter of affirming certain truths - it is an experience of God Himself.
    - Oh how some of you need to hear this. You grew up in religious homes where rules and rituals were stressed but there was a deadness to the whole thing. Perhaps you even rejected Christianity because religion just isn’t your thing.
      - I want you to see here that although true Christianity certainly does mean fighting against sin, the essence of Christianity is a continual experience of God. It is a deep existential connection with God. It is soul stirring fellowship with your Creator.
- Let me show you what I mean. Everything about the second half of verse 15 and then all of verse 16 is put in experiential terms. There are two experiences here. **(SHOW SLIDE)** First, the Holy Spirit enables us to experience God as Father. Look at the second half of verse 15. **READ 15b** – *“And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”*
  - Notice that it is the Holy Spirit who enables us to cry out. It is “by him” that we cry out. To cry out is of course experiential language. It can refer to loud cries or great expressions of emotion. But this is not just any old crying out. It is crying out in prayer to God as Father.

- The Holy Spirit then enables us to experience our adoption not by point to Himself but by pointing us to the Father.
- The problem with being around church a lot is that this language does not hit you as it should. For a Jew to hear this is shocking. The Jews of Jesus' day preferred the exalted titles of God like **"Sovereign Lord"**, **"King of the universe"**, **"Holy One"**, **"Almighty"** or **"Lord of Hosts"**. In the Old Testament God is referred to as a **"father"** only 14 times and generally speaking it refers to him as the father of all creation or that God is **"like"** a father. Non-Christians rarely, if ever, refer to God as Father. They call him **"God."** But Jesus says we should pray to **"Our Father in heaven."**
  - Scholar Dale Bruner points out though that, **"For Jesus, God is not simply like a Father, behind who stands a more awesome God. God is Father."**<sup>2</sup>
  - Scholar Craig Blomberg adds that, **"Use of this intimate term for God was virtually unparalleled in first-century Judaism."**<sup>3</sup>
    - Yet in the four gospels, Jesus refers to God as **"father"** or prayers to him as **"my Father"**<sup>4</sup> some seventy times.
- We get a picture of Jesus' intimate relationship with God, the night before He died. In the garden he is overcome with emotion as he considers what he is about to go through in order to rescue God's people. He is so overcome with emotion and anguish that Mark says he **"fell to the ground"** and the first anguished words from his mouth are, **"Abba, Father."** In the hour of his greatest need he calls out to His Father.
  - Let me ask you something: What language is this word **"Abba"**? It is Aramaic which is the language Jesus spoke. Do you know what language 99% of the NT is written in? Answer: Greek. Why does Mark, and later on Paul, retain the original language of Jesus and not simply translate it? Every word in Romans is Greek and then suddenly there is one word of Aramaic. Why?
    - Could it be that the disciples were so impacted by hearing Jesus calling God **"Abba"** that they did not want to even tamper with it? It's almost as if each time they went to pray they remembered how Jesus related to God, so intimately, so tenderly, so directly, and echoes of his voice led them to deeper prayer. Paul has heard of this and so follows their example.
- I remember when Josh first began to speak and called me "dada." Actually, as I mentioned before he called me, **"dadada."** Every time he calls me this my heart is warmed.
  - The Holy Spirit says to us, **"You know the kind of relationship Jesus has with God, his Father. By my power I am bringing you into that relationship where you are his son or daughter and come directly to him, experientially relating to him not just as a Creator or King but as a loving Father."**

<sup>2</sup> Dale Bruner, *Matthew – The Christbook*, 294.

<sup>3</sup> Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, 119.

<sup>4</sup> For further examples of Jesus praying to God as Father see: Mat 11:25; 26:39, 42; Mk 14:36; Lk 23:34; Jn 11:41; 12:27; 17:1, 5, 11, 21, 24f.

- But there is a second experience here. Really I think they are two sides of the same coin. They both concern our adoption. As we have seen the first is experiencing God as Father. **(SHOW SLIDE)** In the second place, the Holy Spirit enables us to experience ourselves as the Father's adopted children. The first points up to who God is and the second points inward at who we are.
  - So look at verse 16 now. **READ 16** – *“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”* This verse describes what we call “the witness of the Holy Spirit.” This word “testify” is a legal word from first century adoption. Commentator William Barclay explains: *“The adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. Now, supposed the adopting father died, and then suppose that there was some dispute about the right of the adopted son to inherit, one or more of the seven original witnesses stepped forward and swore that the adoption was genuine and true...So, Paul is saying, it is the Holy Spirit Himself who is the witness to our adoption into the family of God.”*<sup>5</sup>
- But notice who it is that the Spirit bears witness to in this verse? Who does he testify to? Us. He bears witness with or to our spirits that we are indeed the children of God.
  - So God does not just say, *“I love you as my children. Trust that this is true on the basis of what I did for you in Jesus.”* That would be enough. But he does more. The Holy Spirit enables us to experience that truth in the deepest part of our being.
- As I mentioned, Josh is still learning to trust my love for him. He is still hesitant. Over his lifetime there is one easy way to prove my love for him. I can show him these documents and say, *“Josh, I loved you so much that, like God who leaves the 99 sheep to go after the one lost sheep, I left some of my other kids at home, flew half way around the world, paid thousands of dollars to rescue you, and legally adopted you as my son.”* I could say, *“Josh, look at the facts. They prove that I love you.”* That would be true.
  - But there is a deeper way to show him my love that in time I trust will win him over. I smile at him, come down to his level and greet him. When I can see his heart is soft, I pick him up and then throw him into the air. He laughs but then reverts back to his anxiety with me and says he is all done.
    - So then I give him a kiss and another kiss and put him down. The process is gradual but the more I shower him with love and kisses the more he is learning to trust my love for him.
      - Listen carefully now: Josh does not become more of my son when I kiss him. My kisses do not change his status but they do increase his enjoyment of being my son.
- And this is what the Holy Spirit does. Remember the prodigal son story. The prodigal son could not believe that his father would still love him after all he did so he proposed that he earn his way back into the family by working as a hired servant for his dad. But what happened?

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<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans*, 113.

- We read that ***“while he was still a long way off the father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to him, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”***
  - That is a metaphor for the work of the Holy Spirit. He kisses us, over and over, until our doubts of his love fall away before his love.
- This experience of the Spirit can come in degrees. Most often it is just a general assurance that you are indeed God’s child. But there are times when the witness of the Spirit comes with great emotion and force. I think that is what happened to John when he wrote First John. He is writing and suddenly he just gets caught up in all that God has done and he exclaims, ***“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.”***
- Now this is all wonderful stuff but haven’t we strayed off topic? Wasn’t Paul’s point that we need to leave our old ways of sin? Yes it still is. So what I want you to see is how Paul goes about calling us to make war against sin. Paul does not hammer on us and say, ***“Sin is bad. Don’t sin. Sin will destroy you.”*** That is all true but you already know that. Your problem and my problem is that deep down inside, like Adam and Eve, we don’t really trust that God loves us and has our best interests in mind. No one sins because they are forced to. We sin because we want to.
  - Just being told not to does not go deep enough. But when you hear about the fact of adoption and the experience of adoption it so captures your heart that the desire to sin becomes repulsive. Our hearts are always drawn to what they find most desirable. The Holy Spirit’s job is to show us that Jesus is far more desirable than sin.
    - So you see although Christianity does have rules that make life work best, Christianity is not at its heart about rule keeping. It is at its heart a the relationship of a former slave, who has been adopted as a son or daughter, to God the Father.

## THE FUTURE OF ADOPTION

- Let’s come to the final point now. This one will be short. We have looked at the fact of adoption, the experience of adoption, and now finally we come to say that **(SHOW SLIDE)** we must turn away from our old ways of sin because of the future of adoption.
  - As if Paul has not captured our hearts enough there is one more thing. Look at verse 17. **READ 17** – ***“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”***
- The story just gets better. Not only did God send Jesus to rescue us from slavery, he also adopted us. Not only did he adopt us he also gave us the Holy Spirit to bear witness that we are the children of God. And now we see that since we have this legal status as children there is also a great future awaiting us.

- **(SHOW SLIDE)** Since we have been adopted we will one day inherit a fortune beyond imagination. This next week we are updating our will. Since Josh is our legal son he will have an equal share in our inheritance.
- As Christians we have been joined to, or united to Christ. We are therefore co-heirs with Christ. Jesus is the only son of the Father. He gets the inheritance. Now follow this: since we are united to Jesus we get to share in what Jesus gets. And what does Jesus inherit? Well let's just say it is a whole lot more than Josh will inherit. Hebrews 1 says that Jesus has been ***“appointed the heir of all things.”*** One day Jesus will return and renew the heavens and the earth. He will set up his kingdom on earth and we will reign with him forever and ever.
  - And in that future age Jesus will say, ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”*** And like children walking into Disneyland, we will grab one another and with tears of joy running down our faces say, ***“Can you believe it? Look at this place. Look at Him. Do we really get all this?”***
    - And he will say, ***“My sufferings earned it. It is mine and since you are also mine, everything is yours.”***
      - Paul ends verse 17 by saying that since we share in Christ's sufferings – since we get made fun of, are misunderstood, and fight against sin, since we share in his sufferings, we will also share in his glory.
- Friends, this is why and how you should turn away from your old ways of living. Jesus freed you from slavery. You have the Spirit of adoption. You are legally a child of God. By Him you cry Abba Father. The Holy Spirit testifies to your spirit that you are a child of God. And since you are an adopted child you have inheritance waiting for you that makes all the wealth of this world seem like one copper penny.
  - This is who you are. Now put away that old life of sin.

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