



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,

In these three verses Paul is clearly talking about what he calls our “**adoption**” as sons and children of God. The very word “**adoption**” is an incredibly rich word just pregnant with great theological meaning. The actual Greek word for “**adoption**” is “*huiothesia*” and it literally means “to place as a son”. When someone is adopted, they are officially given a new status and a new name and a new start in their life. It is really a wonderful event in their life. John MacArthur says that the technical definition of the word “*refers to a legal action by which someone takes into their family a child that is not their own and usually not even related to them for the purpose of treating the child as their own child and giving the child all of the privileges of their own children*”.

Wayne Grudem defines adoption as “*an act of God whereby He makes us members of His family*”. It means to formally and legally declare that someone who is not your own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as your own child, including complete rights of inheritance. Charles Ryrie defines adoption as “*the act of God that places a new believer into His family and it emphasizes the idea of adulthood and full privileges into the family of God. Simultaneous and concurrent with adoption is the divesting of all relationships and responsibilities of the previous family.*”

In the first century, adoption was much more of a Roman term and practice than a Hebrew term or practice. The Hebrews did not even have any laws regarding adoption. They simply did not practice adoption like the Romans because they had what was known as the law of the “levirate marriage”. This was a practice by which a man could marry his brother’s widow in order to raise up an heir to inherit the family property. So, for many years they simply practiced polygamy. If the first wife could not have any children, then the man would often take on another wife to raise up an heir.

However, in the Roman culture it was a very common practice to adopt a son to be the legal heir of a family. In the Roman-Greco world in which Paul was writing, the wealthy and influential practiced adoption all the time. There were childless couples. There were couples whose sons may have been killed in war. There were couples who had sons that may have been mentally handicapped. There were couples who had rebellious and defiant sons. There is something similar to that in the story of the Prodigal Son. There were sons who moved away and there were not the means of communication and transportation that we enjoy. In some cases, some parents were willing to let their children be adopted simply as a way of improving their lot in life.

So, an adopted son was very often someone deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate. He was no less inferior in status to a natural born son and might well enjoy the father’s affection even more fully than a natural born son. In many cases, for instance, a natural born son may have been rebellious and indifferent to his family’s wishes, and so the father would



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

choose to adopt a son in order to transfer his estate to him. This happened all of the time in the Roman culture.

In the Bible, however, Paul gave the word a new, Holy Spirit-inspired meaning. Only Paul uses the word “**adoption**” to describe the relationship of believers to their Heavenly Father. Paul is the only writer of the New Testament that uses the word “**adoption**” (five total uses in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians). No concept can be more meaningful to a believer because “**adoption**” deposits everything that God owns into the accounts of His sons and daughters whom He has chosen to adopt into His family. This is as personal as it can possibly be.

In v15 that translations are somewhat divided on the “**S**” vs. the “**s**” relative to the word “**the Spirit of adoption**”. It really should be “**S**” because the Holy Spirit is the One who has actually made believers to sons and daughters of God. Believers are “**born of the Spirit**” into the kingdom of God. The Holy Spirit is the One who has freed each believer from sin and death (v2). He is the One who enables them to fulfill the righteous requirements of the Law (v4). He has given them a new nature. He empowers their life so that they can be victorious (v10). And here, He is the One who confirms their adoption by bringing them into God’s family. He is the One who makes us “**children of God**”!

Now, there were four specific consequences and effects that took place in an actual adoption process:

1. **The adopted son lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a son in his new family.** In the most binding and legal way, he got a new father.
2. **Once adopted, the son became the heir or joint-heir to his new father’s estate.** And even if other sons were born before or after his adoption, it did not affect his rights. He was still a co-heir with the other natural siblings.
3. **By law, the old life of the adopted person was completely rescinded.** For instance, all debts were cancelled. The adopted individual was regarded as a new person entering into a new life.
4. **In the eyes of the law the adopted son was irrevocably the son of his new father.** If things did not work out, then he could not be unadopted, nor could his inheritance be retracted. He was now unconditionally a permanent part of his new family.

In what is known as the Order of Salvation (Ordo Salutis) there is the listing of the basic order of events related to a believer’s overall salvation from eternity past into eternity future.

Election (predestination)
Regeneration (being born again)
Calling
Conversion (faith and repentance)
Justification
Adoption
Sanctification
Glorification



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

So, the believer's adoption is something that basically happens **simultaneously** with their regeneration and conversion experience. Even though it is distinct in its effects, it is never separate from regeneration, conversion, and justification. They are all part and parcel of the same process. Sinners are regenerated by God, or born again, so that they can believe. They are then converted to Christ through His calling them into faith and repentance, both of which are gifts given to them by God. Next, they are justified and declared to be righteous by God, and because of all of that, they are then adopted into God's family as one of His children, and are given all of the privileges of being in God's family.

In **regeneration** God gives the spiritually dead sinner new spiritual life within so that they can believe. Before the act of regeneration, everyone is utterly "**dead in trespasses and sins**" and has no ability whatsoever to even believe. [Ephesians 2:1](#) says,

¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins,

So God does a supernatural work in the sinner so that they can believe. The theological term is called "regeneration" or being "**born again**". The sinner is then **converted** when the Holy Spirit gives the gift of repentance and the gift of faith to believe. In the judicial act of **justification**, God gives the new believer a right standing before Him. However, in **adoption**, God actually makes the new believer a part of His very family. This is the personal and intimate side of salvation.

For instance, justification is legal, judicial. There is nothing personal about it at all. We are simply declared righteous before God. It is a legal standing. It is similar to being in court and the judge passing a verdict – guilty or not guilty. It is not something personal at all – just a declaration. In the believer's case, God has passed judgment and they have been declared not guilty. However, in **adoption** everything is very personal. Believer's actually become children of God, sons of God, a part of God's family. We all have known families who adopted a young child, and they were just thrilled in being able to do so. The whole event became so personal to everyone.

No wonder in v15 Paul says that we cry out "**Abba, Father**" – Daddy! The word "**Abba**" is an Aramaic word, not a Greek word – and it also means "**Father**". It is like saying "**Father, Father**". I.e., what is happening in adoption is that the Holy Spirit is producing in the believer the realization that they are a child of God, a part of His family. For instance, [John 1:12](#) says,

¹²But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:

Now, just think about the contrast for someone who is not a part of God's family. [Ephesians 2:1-3](#) describes it this way,

¹And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ²in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

In [John 8:42-44](#), Jesus told those men who claimed to have God as their Father,

⁴²Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. ⁴³Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. ⁴⁴You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.

The following is a summary of what the words and the process mean:

- **Regeneration changes our nature** – dead in sins to alive in Christ.
- **Justification changes our standing** – guilty to not guilty.
- **Adoption changes our position** – sons of wrath to sons of God.
- **Sanctification changes our character** – ungodly to godly.

You may ask, “*What evidence should there be in our lives that we can know that we are one of God’s children?*” That is a great question, an incredibly important question – maybe the most important question. Paul gives us an answer in [Galatians 4:4-7](#) that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are in fact God’s children.

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

So, as one of God’s children, there is this deep and abiding conviction within your soul that simply says “*I know that I have been saved, and I know that I am one of God’s children.*” Why? Because you have been legally adopted into God’s family and the Holy Spirit supernaturally bears witness to that fact. Each believer has been given the Holy Spirit who is the agent, the cause, and the means of adoption, and He enables the believer to recognize that they are now one of God’s children. Through the act of regeneration and the giving of the Holy Spirit, God is ensuring that as His children that each believer now has His nature, His disposition, His character, and His outlook in their lives.

It is this conviction and this deep and abiding influence of the Holy Spirit that begins to purify the believer’s life. [1 John 3:1-3](#) says,

¹Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ²Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

He also says in [Romans 8:14](#),

¹⁴For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

I.e., one of the benefits and privileges of being one of God's children is the fact that the Holy Spirit places within each of His children the desire to obey Him as their Father, to know Him more intimately, and to live according to what they know to be His will for their life. That simple statement is as supernatural as it gets because a believer could never have done that on their own. This is a very affirming statement here – that those who “**are led...are sons**”. **No one will ever enter into God's family whose spirit, affections, and attitudes are alien to what God desires for His family.**

Just think of what it would be like if you were to remain a son or daughter of Adam for your entire life, thus never saved and never a part of God's family. Just think of what it would be like if you were never adopted into God's family. You see, adoption clearly implies a transfer from one family into another family. This is the very pinnacle and apex of God's grace on the believer's life that they are now one of His children through adoption. They had no other way to enter unless He chose them and brought them into His family. It is by this spiritual adoption that God becomes the believer's “**Father**”.

So, how is a believer ultimately adopted into God's family? The New Testament always connects adoption with saving faith and with the sinner's response in trusting Christ for their salvation. [Galatians 3:26](#) says,

²⁶**For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.**

[John 1:12](#) says,

¹²**But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.**

These two verses provide the understanding that adoption is God's responding to biblical faith in Christ. Adoption cannot be associated with regeneration, or being “**born again**”. Why? It is because adoption is the exact opposite of actually being born into a family. **We are actually adopted into God's family.** Think of it this way. There are two distinct ways to become a part of a “human” family. You can be born into that family or you can be adopted into that family, but you can only be adopted into “God's” family. Before salvation we were called “**sons of Adam**”. However, after salvation and the corresponding adoption, we are now called “**sons of God**”. The Father chooses us in election and then calls us in salvation to become a part of His family, and He makes us a part of His family through adoption.

Someone is going to remark that the Bible talks about being “**born again**”, or being born into God's family – which it does. Being “**born of God**” is a phrase only used five times, and each time in [1 John 3, 4, or 5](#). The idea of being “**born again**” presented in [John 3](#) is speaking specifically of the doctrine of regeneration. However, in [1 John](#) the phrase “**born of God**” is talking specifically of those simultaneous events leading to salvation and ultimately adoption. It is speaking of sonship. Once again, all of those events occur somewhat simultaneously, but they are all different from one another. The believer cannot affect their being born in any way whatsoever. A person cannot birth themselves. No one ever has anything whatsoever to do with their birth. It is completely independent of them in every conceivable way. So in regeneration, God gives to the dead sinner a spiritual life that



HOLY SPIRIT - ROMANS 8:14-16

Part 7

they did not previously have, a life that they could not produce or generate on their own. Prior to salvation, the sinner is absolutely and completely dead in their sins, but they come to Christ by the gift of faith and repentance which God gives to them. They are then justified and then adopted into God's family so that they can be one of His children.

Now, some may not really consider this to be too important, but it really is. In some ways, the believer's **adoption** may be the most meaningful of all of the benefits of their salvation. For instance, in the act of regeneration when God gives spiritual life (something that the sinner did not previously have), God could have just left it at that. I.e., He could have just given the believer a form of spiritual life, but no more. Has He done that before? Yes, very much so. He created angels. He gave them spiritual life, but they are not members of His family like believers are, and they do not share all of the special privileges that believers have with God. In a sense, they are just servants, but not sons, and therefore they do not share in the inheritance of sons.

And by the same token, God could simply have justified the believer and given them a righteous standing before Him, but without it ever being personal. When we died, He could have just placed us on another planet somewhere – fully justified and forgiven, but not with Him. But He did not do that. Rather, He adopted us for the very purpose of our actually being with Him in eternity. Adoption is what creates our **relationship** with God, and it opens the door for all of the benefits of being a part of His family.