

The Spirit of Adoption

Romans 8:9-17

Everyone who comes to the Father through the Son is brought there by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit applies all the blessings of salvation to us because He identifies us with Jesus Himself. It's by the Spirit that we conquer sin and look toward our complete adoption, calling out, "Abba, Father."

In the Spirit

Paul contrasts the carnal mind, at enmity with God, and the spiritual mind marked by life and peace (vv. 7-8). The former focuses on the things of the flesh, and the other on the things of the Spirit, so that those in the flesh cannot please God (vv. 5, 8). These two ways of existing are not on a continuum but are strictly opposite ways of being. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit, He doesn't belong to God (v. 9). Christians are not in the flesh but in the Spirit; if He dwells in you, He does so fully, "given without measure", as Jesus says (v. 9; Jn. 3:34). You don't get a thimble-full of the Holy Spirit. He indwells you such that even though your body is dead (dying, but dead in principle) on account sin, the Spirit (in you) is life on account of righteousness (v. 10). Paul says "the Spirit of Christ" in verse nine and now "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead", referring to the Father (v. 11). The Spirit doesn't work apart from the Father and the Son, but with them, and thus the Father will give life to your mortal body, raising you up, just like He did for Jesus (v. 11). The Spirit is either in you or not, and if He is in you, you lack nothing of what you need to follow Jesus into eternal, bodily life. A true, humble, normal Christian is indwelt by the same Spirit who was there at the creation of the world, hovering over the waters; the same Spirit who came upon Sampson when he tore apart the lion; the same Spirit that descended on Jesus Christ at His baptism; and the same Spirit that was poured out on the church at Pentecost (Gen. 1:2; Jdgs. 14:6; Lk. 3:22; Acts 2:17). One central way to stop feeling spiritually aimless or inadequate is to believe this wonderful truth.

Led by the Spirit

Because of this, we're debtors—obligated, inclined, and on track—not to live according to the flesh, which is death (v. 12). You have no obligation or valid reason to scratch any sinful itch. To live according to the flesh is to ensure death, but if you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (v. 13). Paul describes the deeds of the body: "fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). Christians with the Spirit of God still have to mortify these desires, and doing so allows the fruit of the Spirit to flourish: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22). Notice the nature of what the Spirit produces. When we are led by the Spirit, we bear His fruit. He is not leading by pulling our ears or yanking a chain around our necks. Think of the members that need to be put to death as poison in the soil, keeping the plant from growing. Remove the poison, kill the locusts, give the tree nutrients in the soil, rain and sunshine, and it naturally bears fruit. That is the Christian who is indwelt and led by the Holy Spirit. To see the power of the Holy Spirit, compare the apostles before Pentecost and after. In the gospels they argue over who is the greatest, want to call down fire on their enemies, and are slow to believe (Jn. 20:25). Even after the resurrection they don't know if Jesus is going to restore the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6). But once the Spirit is poured out on the church, they are unstoppable (Jn. 4:19-20, 23-31). Not perfect, but powerful (Acts 15:38-40).

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Children of God

To be led by the Spirit of God is to be marked as a son of God (v. 14). To say “son” is not to exclude daughters (Num. 6:17-18; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; Is. 43:6). Paul contrasts the spirit of bondage to fear with Spirit of adoption who causes us to cry out, “Abba, Father” (v. 15). We are in *the* Son. Apart from God and out of step with the Spirit, we are given to all kinds of fears. But in the Spirit, we call upon our Abba, Father to deliver us in and through Jesus, and just like He did (Mk. 14:36). We cry out to God our Father from our spirit that we are His children—that we belong to Him—and God Himself, the Holy Spirit of Christ, also testifies that we are (v. 16). We are completely engulfed in the life of the Trinity. Children receive an inheritance, so because we are sons of God in Christ, we are joint heirs with Him. This means suffering, since Christ suffered, but then glorification, which means our bodies will be glorified like His; raised from the dead with power of indestructible life (v. 17). This is what it means that “we may also be glorified together.” We already have the Spirit and have been adopted, but the full effect and finality is yet to come (cf. 8:23). The resurrection-glorification will be more than just physical. C.S. Lewis in describes it: “The promise of glory is the promise, almost incredible and only possible by the work of Christ, that some of us, that any of us who really chooses, shall please God. To please God . . . to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness . . . to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.” The weight of glory that God is bestowing on us is His delight in Jesus (cf. Matt. 3:17). We will need a new body to carry that much joy, and the Spirit of adoption is preparing us for that day.