

Adopted By God - Part # 5

“The Assurance of Adoption - Part # 1”

Text: Romans 8:12-17

- Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 10, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Michael Reagan is a famous radio talk show host and author. Shortly after he was born, former U.S. President Ronald Reagan and his wife Nancy adopted him. When Michael grew up he had a biological son named Cameron. One day Michael was called to the school where he found Cameron sitting on the schoolyard steps in tears.
 - **“Daddy,” he said, “is Grandpa really my grandpa?” “Of course he is,” I said. Why do you ask?” He looked down at his shoes. “Because one of the kids told me that you’re adopted. And if you’re adopted, you’re not really Grandpa’s son. And if you’re not really his son, then Grandpa’s not really my grandpa.”**¹
- Michael said his son’s words went through him **“like a spear, hitting me in one of my most vulnerable places: my adoption.”** Even though his father, Ronald Reagan, had made it clear that he was his son, Michael struggled to feel like he truly belonged.
 - And now a schoolyard bully was attacking his own son’s identity, stealing his joy and the assurance that he belonged. Michael’s response was perfect. First, he brought assurance to his son by declaring the facts. **“Cameron,” I said. “I was adopted into the Reagan family, and the Reagan family is my family. President Reagan is my father, and he’s your Grandpa. You are the grandson of the President and part of his family just like I am.”**²
 - Michael went further. He also brought assurance by pointing Cameron to a piece of evidence that proved they were both part of the Reagan family: **“I pointed toward a man wearing a dark suit and sunglasses. ‘If you weren’t the grandson of the President, you wouldn’t have Secret Service agents around you all the time, would you?’”** Cameron looked at the agent and then grinned. **“I guess not,”** he said.³
- Every true Christian is a son or daughter of God through adoption. Every true Christian has the King of the Universe as their Father. And yet, there are many voices that attack the Christian’s assurance of this fact. Have you heard them?
 - They say, **“Oh yes, every true Christian is a child of God but are you certain that you are truly a Christian? If you are really his child, why is there so much sin in your life? You’re impatient. You fight with your spouse. You lust. You tell lies. And there is that one sin that you just keeping doing even though you know better. And look at how little you pray and read the Bible. Are you really a son or daughter of God?”**
 - These voices fill us with doubts, steal our joy, and make us feel insecure and uncertain about our relationship with God.
- Yet, like any good father, God wants his sons and daughters to know they are and are his and are loved by him. This is why Romans 8 is so glorious because Romans 8 is all about assurance. In order that Christians might be assured of their salvation, Paul develops, and weaves together, two themes. The first is adoption and the second is the work of the Holy Spirit.⁴

¹ Michael Reagan and Jim Denney, *Twice Adopted* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004), 283.

² Ibid., 284.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The introduction of the term “sons of God” will dominate and unify Romans 8:12-39 as multiple terms are employed to show that all believers are members of God’s family: “sons of God” (vv. 14, 19), “children of God” (vv. 16, 17, 21), “adoption as sons” (vv. 15, 23), “conformed to the image of his Son” (v. 29), “firstborn among many brothers” (v. 29). Likewise, the Holy Spirit dominates Romans 8 with sixteen references, eight of which occur in verses 12-27, and one of which brings together both adoption and the Spirit: “the Spirit of adoption” (v. 15).

- These two themes are brought together most clearly in verse 16. **READ 16 - *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*** Clearly, God wants his children to know they are his children.
- The question, then, is how does the Spirit assure us that we are the children of God? Like Michael gave his son Cameron a piece of evidence to prove that he belonged to the Reagan family, Paul shows us that there are at least two pieces of evidence that prove who the children of God truly are.
 - The first is in verse 14: those who are “led by the Spirit” can be assured that they are the sons of God. The second is in verse 15: those whom the Spirit enables to cry out to God as Father can be assured that they are the children of God.
 - Today we will look at the first piece of evidence and next week we will look at the second.
- This morning, I am praying that the Spirit would silence the voices that make the children of God uncertain of their Father’s love. I am praying that the Spirit would bear witness with our spirits so that that everyone who is truly his child would be assured of it.
 - So let’s look at verse 14 this morning and talk about three things: who is *not* adopted by God, who is adopted by God, and how to know if you have been adopted by God.

WHO IS NOT ADOPTED BY GOD

- Let’s begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 2) who is *not* adopted by God.**
 - Those very words may strike you as wrong. *Not* a child of God? Isn’t everyone a child of God?
 - For two centuries liberal churches have taught that Christianity can be summarized as the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man. In other words, God is everyone’s Father and we are all God’s children.
- Does the Bible teach this? The answer is a very small “yes,” and a gigantic “no!” On the one hand the answer is, **“yes, all people are the children of God in the sense that we are all created by God.”**
 - In Acts 17:28-29 Paul tells the intellectuals in Athens that God is our Creator and that we are “God’s offspring” (Acts 17:29). So God is the Father of every human being in the sense that he gives us life.
- However, this is not the primary way the Bible speaks for it continually makes a distinction between those who are the children of God and those who are not.⁵ Our passage in Romans 8:14 is perhaps the clearest example of this.
 - According to this verse, the evidence that you are an adopted child of God is that you are “led by the Spirit.” We have not yet defined what that means but we can say that **(SHOW SLIDE 3) whoever is *not* “led by the Spirit” is *not* adopted by God.**
- It is right here that some people find adoption so offensive. The great author and poet George MacDonald called adoption a **“hideous”⁶** and **“evil doctrine.”⁷** In one of his novels he has his main character say, **“the doctrine of adoption is the falsest of false doctrines.”⁸** Why did he hate adoption so much?
 - Because the very concept of adoption assumes that we are *not* the children of God by nature and so must *become* the children of God by adoption.

⁵ Tim Keller makes the distinction clear: “We talked about Henry Ford being the father of the Model T. That doesn’t mean he had them all around his table every night. It didn’t mean he tucked them into bed. He didn’t get them little drinks of water at 4:00 a.m. when they asked for it. To be your creator is one thing; to be your father is another. Every other religion says you can know the creator and you can be his servant or his student or his citizen or his follower, but Christianity alone has the audacity to say through Christ your Creator can become your Father.” 2013

⁶ George MacDonald, “Abba, Father!,” in *Unspoken Sermons* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 191.

⁷ MacDonald, 191.

⁸ George MacDonald, *Donal Grant* (New York: Yurita Press, 2015), Location 4221, Kindle.

- The very idea of adoption goes against the universal fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man for as Charles Spurgeon asked, ***“how can God adopt [people] if they are all his children already?”***⁹
- According to the Bible it is a deadly mistake to think that we are, by nature, the children of God. In fact, Ephesians 2:3 says that because of our sin we are ***“by nature children of wrath.”*** Romans 6:20 says that we ***“were slaves to sin.”***¹⁰
 - In the Bible there is only one who is, by nature, the Son of God and that is Jesus. The rest of us must *become* the sons of God by adoption.
 - So we begin with this basic fact: not everyone is a child of God.

WHO IS ADOPTED BY GOD

- In the second place, let’s talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 4) who is adopted by God.** We have said that whoever is *not* led by the Spirit is *not* a child of God.
 - But now on the flipside we need to say: **(SHOW SLIDE 5) whoever is “led by the Spirit” is adopted by God.**
 - This is easy to see in verse 14. Look at it again. **READ 14 - For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**
- The main point is obvious: whoever is led by the Spirit is adopted by God.
 - But let just make three quick points to make the main point even clearer.
- First, this verse is not saying we become the sons of God by being led by the Spirit. How do you get adopted into God’s family? By receiving Jesus Christ. Being led by the Spirit is a piece of evidence that proves a person has received Jesus and is therefore adopted by God.
 - Think of it this way: Cameron Regan did not become a Regan by having Secret Service agents. The Secret Service agents were evidence that he already was a Regan.
 - So also, Paul is not talking about how to be adopted. He is talking about evidence that shows you already are adopted. One piece of evidence is that you are led by the Spirit. So you must ask yourself, ***“Am I led by the Spirit?”***
- Second, notice that the sonship Paul is talking about is sonship by adoption, not sonship by birth. We know this because verse 15 begins with the word “for,” which links the two verses.
 - So Paul is saying, ***“if you want to understand what I mean by sonship in verse 14 then read on to verse 15.”*** And in verse 15 he says that the Spirit we have received is ***“the Spirit of adoption as sons.”***
- Third, notice that adoption is the privilege of every single Christian and not just some super Christians. Notice that little word “all” in verse 14: ***“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”***
 - What a glorious word! Every single person who is “led by the Spirit” is already a son of God by adoption. This high status is not the privilege of a few super Christians. It is the privilege of every single Christian.
- So Paul writes this to bring assurance of adoption. Michael Reagan gave his son Cameron a piece of evidence that proved he belonged the Reagan family—a piece of evidence that silenced the voices of doubt and insecurity. In the same way, we have seen that the evidence that you are truly adopted by God is that you are “led by the Spirit.”
 - So the obvious, and all-important, question is, “what does it mean to be ‘led by the Spirit?’” If you can answer this, then you can look at your life and see if there is evidence that you are truly a child of God by adoption.

⁹ C.H. Spurgeon, “Our Lord’s Last Cry from the Cross,” in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 39 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1893), 270.

¹⁰ Romans 6:17, 20.

HOW TO KNOW IF GOD HAS ADOPTED YOU

- That leads us to our third point. In the third place we need to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 6) how to know if you have been adopted by God.**
 - We know we have been adopted if there is evidence that we are led by the Spirit. But what does that mean?
- At first glance, it doesn't seem to be very clear what "led by the Spirit" means because Paul doesn't pause to explain it. Christians often speak about the Spirit leading us in the sense of guiding the decisions we make. So does being "led by the Spirit" mean being led to marry the right person, to take the right job, or being led to talk to someone about Jesus? No.
 - How do I know that? Again, pay attention to the basic rules of grammar in verse 14. Notice that verse 14 also begins with the word, "For." It connects the two verses. Paul is saying that if you want to understand what it means in verse 14 to be "led by the Spirit" then you need to go back to verse 13 where he explains it. So let's look at verse 13.
 - **READ 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.**
- Right away we can see that verse 13 is about the Holy Spirit. And what does the Spirit do in verse 13? The Spirit enables the Christian to "put to death the deeds of the body." As we saw last week, this means the Spirit leads the Christian to make war on all the ways we use our bodies for sinful purposes.
 - The Spirit leads us to kill sinful words off our tongues, sinful ways we use our eyes to envy what others have or lust after their bodies. The Spirit leads us to kill the way we use our hands for theft or the way our feet walk into places of sin.
 - So the leading of the Spirit in this verse has nothing to do with choosing the right job or marriage partner. It has to do with how the Spirit leads the Christian to fight against sin.
- So let's put everything we have said together. **(SHOW SLIDE 7) The evidence that you are truly adopted by God is that you are "led by the Spirit." To "be led by the Spirit" means the Spirit leads you to continually make war on the sin in your life.**

THE SPIRIT LEADS US INTO WAR AGAINST OUR SINS

- Every true child of God knows by experience what this means. We become Christians when we receive God's free gift of pardon for our sins in Jesus. We are then adopted into the royal family.
 - But since we once lived as slaves to sin, our Father must now teach us what it means to live as a member of his family. It is for this purpose that he sends his Spirit into our hearts. The Spirit is sent to enable us to kill all the old sins and conform us to the image of Christ.
 - If we were to picture our hearts like castles, the Spirit's role is to lead us to kill the monsters of sin that dwell within our hearts.
- For instance, the Spirit leads us to a door that stands at the end of a dark hallway. Through the door we hear the sound of many voices cursing. The Spirit opens the door revealing hundreds of black ravens flying all about the room.
 - The Spirit says to us, **"These ravens are the filthy language that keeps coming out of your mouth. You are now a child of God and your language needs reflect your new status. Draw your sword. I will enable you to rid your heart of such filth."**
 - And so for a period of time in your life you fight and fight to put to death all the ungodly language that flies out of your mouth.
- The Spirit then leads you to another door that is deeper within your heart. Something keeps crashing against the door. The Spirit opens the door and inside is an enormous bull that is raging around the room.

- The Spirit says, ***“This giant bull is your anger. It is destroying you and everyone else around you. You have been adopted by God and I want to shape you to be patient and gentle like your elder brother Jesus. So pick up your sword and let us kill your anger.”***
 - And what a fierce battle it is. Day by day and year by year, the Spirit leads you to kill your anger and work patience within you.
- You see, this is the great work of the Holy Spirit; namely, to lead the children of God into war on their sin so as to shape them into the image of their elder brother, Jesus.
 - When we first become Christians we think there are only a few such beasts in our hearts. But the Spirit keeps leading us deeper and deeper.
 - He leads us into the great subterranean halls of our hearts where he leads us into battle against the red dragon of lust, the giant serpent of pride, and the green-eyed monster of jealousy.
 - Still the Spirit leads us deeper and into war against the vast goblin armies of greed and materialism and into battles with the wolves of gossip and slander.
 - The Spirit leads us right to the bottom of our hearts to kill the rats of bitterness that we have allowed to live within the deepest cracks of our memories.
- Do you know what it means to be led by the Spirit into war against your own sin? Do you know what it means to hate your sin?
 - Do you know what it means to cry out with the prodigal son, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.”***¹¹
 - Do you know what it means to beat your chest like the tax collector and say, ***“Be merciful to me, a sinner”***?¹²
 - Can you resonate with Paul’s words in Galatians when he says, ***the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do***?¹³
 - Do you know what it means to be continually engaged in war against your own sin?

SILENCING VOICE #1

- Perhaps you say, ***“Yes, I do know all about this. But all of this struggle with sin makes me doubt that I am truly a Christian.”*** This is where our passage is so helpful. Here you learn to distinguish between the Holy Spirit and those voices that would seek to steal your joy, make you feel insecure, and doubt that you are a true Christian.
 - Right here the first voice speaks. This first voice says, ***“If you struggle so much with sin, isn’t that proof that you aren’t really a Christian at all?”***
- Oh let us silence this accusing voice. Listen, a true Christian always laments over how little they love God and how easily they fall prey to the enemy of sin. But have you ever realized that your struggle against sin should also be cause for great rejoicing? What?!
 - Are you saying I should rejoice because I have spent years fighting sexually impure thoughts? Yes! Leap for joy! Are you saying I should rejoice because I am always fighting against my self-centredness? Yes! Shout for joy! Are you saying I should rejoice because I am in a vicious battle with my heart to try and forgive someone who hurt me? Yes!
- Can you see why? Because *only* the true children of God are “led by the Spirit” to hate sin and make war on it. And if you are “led by the Spirit” into war on your sin then this is evidence that you are truly adopted by God.

¹¹ Luke 15:18, 21.

¹² Luke 18:13.

¹³ Galatians 5:17.

- If you do not care about your sin, or reject the very idea of sin, then it is actually evidence that you *do not* possess the Spirit of God, are *not* led by the Spirit, and thus are *not* a son of God by adoption.
 - But if your heart is grieved that sin offends God, if you hate it, if you wage war against it, then it is cause for great rejoicing for this is proof that the Spirit is leading you and ***“all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.”***

SILENCING VOICE #2

- But as soon as you grasp this, then another voice speaks. This voice says, ***“Yes but wouldn’t a true Christian be far more victorious in conquering the sin in their life than you are? You just keep failing. Surely a true child of God doesn’t get defeated this much.”***
 - The key to silencing this voice is to look again at verse 13. It does not say, ***“if by the Spirit, you have become sinless, then you will live.”***
 - No. The verb “put to death” is in the present tense, which refers to an ongoing fight.
- So the point is *not* that you can know you are son of God if you are really successful at killing all your sin and have become perfect. The point is that you can know you are a son of God if, by the Spirit, you are continuously engaged in striving to put your sin to death.
 - If you are in this process then rejoice. This is evidence that you have the Spirit, that the Spirit is leading you, and that you are, therefore, truly adopted by God.

SILENCING VOICE #3

- But then one final voice interrupts and says, ***“But if Jesus has really freed you from sin, and you are the beloved child of God, then why does such a war even exist? Look at the non-Christians around you. They live happy and carefree lives. Their consciences aren’t bothered like yours so often is. Why does this war even exist if Jesus is so powerful?”***
 - Before you became a Christian sin had deceived you into thinking it was your friend. You were at peace with sin. But now that Christ has freed you, sin has become your enemy. You were also once part of this present worldly system that lives in rebellion against God. Now that you have been freed, that system is in opposition to you. Furthermore, you were once a captive of the evil one who had blinded your mind. But now that Christ has freed your mind, and will one day bring you into glory with himself. That is why Revelation 12 says that ***“[The devil] is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”***
 - So yes, becoming a Christian means life gets harder for you are now at war with sin, Satan, and the world. But to be engaged in the struggle of war is the chief proof that a person is no longer a slave but a free person.
- So it is with every true Christian. To be continually engaged in a war with your own sin is proof that you are no longer a slave but one who has been freed from slavery and made a son of God.
 - One day, the scriptures prophesy that the man, Jesus Christ, will return. On that day he will crush Satan under his foot, rid the universe of sin, and bring his people into eternal peace.

CONCLUSION

- You see all of these voices are basically saying the same thing just in different ways. They are all pointing to your sin and your fight with it and using it to make you doubt that you are truly a child of God, to make you feel insecure in your relationship with God.
 - But let the word of God silence these voices. For this morning we have seen the very opposite. If you are engaged in war on your own sin then it is evidence that the Spirit of God has freed your mind from slavery. If you are engaged in a war against your own sin then it is evidence that the Spirit is leading you.
 - Let these final words silence the accusing voices. Let these final words fill your heart with assurance. If the Spirit of God is leading you to make war on your own sin then rejoice! Be glad! Shout for joy! ***“For all who are led by the Spirit are sons of God.”***