

How the Holy Spirit Assures You That God Is Your Father

The Spirit of Christ

There is a difference between living somewhere and belonging somewhere. You can live in a house for years and still feel like a guest in it, careful not to leave a mark, always half expecting to be asked to explain yourself. And you can walk into a place for the first time and feel, somehow, that you are home. Paul says something like that happens inside of us when the Spirit of God comes to live there. He is not just giving you a new address. He is making you family.

Paul writes about this most plainly in his letter to the Romans, chapter eight. Listen to how he puts it.

“For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. 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. The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 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.”

ROMANS 8:14-17

There is a whole world packed into those four verses. Let's slow down and walk through it, because I think most of us have heard the word adoption so often in church that we have stopped feeling the weight of it.

Here is where I want to start. In the world Paul was writing to, adoption was not a soft or sentimental word. It was a legal act with real teeth. When a Roman father adopted a son, that son did not receive some watered down, probationary version of sonship. Every debt he owed under his old family was cancelled. Every claim his old family had on him was severed. And every right that belonged to a natural born son, the right to the family name, the right to the inheritance, the right to stand in that household as if he had always been there, all of it became his. It could not be undone later because someone changed their mind or found a better candidate. The adoption was permanent, and it was full.

That is the picture Paul reaches for when he wants to describe what happens to a person who receives the Spirit of God. Not a demotion into a lesser kind of belonging. Not a trial membership. A complete legal transfer out of one family and into another, with all the rights of a child who was there from the very beginning.

And notice what Paul contrasts it with. He says you did not receive the spirit of slavery, to fall back into fear. Think about what it is like to live under someone you are never quite sure of. You watch their mood. You try to read the room before you speak. You measure your worth in that household by how well you performed that day. That is what Paul means by the spirit of slavery. It is the posture of someone who has to keep proving they belong.

Paul says that is not what happened to you. You did not trade one form of anxious performance for another. You were adopted. And an adopted child does not have to earn their place in the family after the adoption is finalized. The place was already given.

This is where the series has been building toward something, because this is not only family language. It is royal family language. Paul says if you are a child, you are also an heir, a fellow heir with Christ. Think about what that means inside the larger story of the King and his kingdom that we have been tracing through this

whole series. Jesus is not merely a private savior who forgives you and leaves you where he found you. He is the King who has already begun to reign, and the Spirit is how his reign reaches into your life right now. And one of the first things his reign does is bring you into his own household as a co-heir. Not a servant standing outside the throne room waiting to be summoned. A son or a daughter, given a share in the King's own inheritance, ahead of the day when that inheritance is fully revealed.

I think that changes how we should picture the kingdom. It is not only something you are waiting for out there in the future. Part of how the King establishes his reign right now is by making you family. Adoption is kingdom business.

And this was not a plan God improvised after the fact, scrambling to make something good out of a situation he had not foreseen. Paul writes in his letter to the Ephesians:

“He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

EPHESIANS 1:5

Your place in this family was not an afterthought. It was the purpose. Before you ever cried out to him, he had already determined to call you his own.

Paul says something almost identical in his letter to the Galatians, and it is worth hearing both together because they say it slightly differently.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

GALATIANS 4:4-7

Do you notice the order there? In Romans, it can sound like the Spirit is given because we are already sons. Here in Galatians, Paul says God sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts because we are sons, and that Spirit is the one doing the crying out. Either way you read it, the point is the same. Sonship and the Spirit's presence are bound together. You cannot have the status without the Spirit who makes it real inside of you.

And that word Paul uses twice, in both letters, is Abba. It is an Aramaic word, the kind of word a child would use for their father at home, intimate and unguarded. Paul does not translate it into Greek and leave it there. He keeps the original word and adds the Greek word for Father right alongside it, Abba, Father, almost like he wants both the tenderness of the Aramaic and the clarity of the Greek to land at the same time. This is not formal, distant address. This is the cry of a child who knows exactly whose house they are standing in.

Here is what I think is easy to miss in these verses. Paul does not say the Spirit informs you that you are adopted, the way you might read a document that confirms your status. He says the Spirit is the one crying out. The Spirit himself does something in you. This is not a truth you merely come to understand with your mind, the

way you might understand a fact about your family history. It is a cry the Spirit produces from inside of you, toward God, using that word.

Which brings us to assurance. Paul goes on, in Romans, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. That word Paul uses there for bears witness is a legal and relational word. It describes something more like testimony than a feeling that comes and goes. The Spirit is not simply making you feel warm toward God from time to time. The Spirit is testifying, alongside your own spirit, to a fact. You belong to this family.

This matters because assurance can go wrong in two directions. One way it goes wrong is when someone tries to build their confidence before God entirely on shifting feelings, chasing an emotional high as proof that they belong, and then falling into despair the moment the feeling fades. The Spirit's witness in Romans eight is not offered as one more mood to chase. It is offered as testimony you can rest your weight on, whether the emotional temperature of the moment is high or low. The other way it goes wrong is when someone tries to talk themselves into assurance through sheer effort, reasoning their way into confidence the way you might argue a case in court, with no real sense that God himself is saying anything to them at all. Paul will not let us collapse into either extreme. He says the Spirit bears witness with our spirit. Two voices, if you can call it that, agreeing. Not your feelings alone. Not your arguments alone. The Spirit of God, testifying to your own spirit, and your spirit recognizing the truth of what is being said.

So where does that leave us. I think it leaves us here. If you are in Christ, you are not in a probationary household, waiting to see if you measure up before the adoption is made final. It is already final. You are not meant to relate to God the way a nervous employee relates to a boss they are not sure they can trust. You

have been given the Spirit of a son, of a daughter, and that Spirit inside of you is already crying out toward the Father, whether or not you have found the words for it yourself yet.

Here is where I want to leave this with you. Not as something to file away as one more true thing you now know about the Spirit, but as something to actually do. Right now, wherever you are, I want you to say the word out loud. Abba. Father. Not because the word itself is magic, but because Paul tells us this is exactly what the Spirit in you is already doing, and he is inviting you to add your own voice to it.

And as you say it, ask yourself clearly which posture you have actually been living in. Have you been approaching God like a servant who has to perform well enough to stay in the house. Or have you been living like what you actually are, a child, adopted, secure, with a share in everything that belongs to the King. Those two postures produce very different lives. One is anxious and exhausting. The other is free.

Paul is not offering you a theory about the Spirit in these verses. He is describing what the Spirit is doing in you at this very moment, crying out toward the Father on your behalf. The invitation is simply to join in. Abba, Father. Say it, and let it be true.

Group Discussion Questions

- 1 Paul contrasts the spirit of slavery with the Spirit of adoption. What does living like a servant who has to keep proving themselves look like in everyday life, and where do you see it show up in the church?

- 2 The session describes assurance going wrong in two directions: chasing feelings, or arguing yourself into confidence. Which one is easier for you to fall into, and what helps you return to the Spirit's witness?
- 3 Adoption is described as part of how the King establishes his reign right now. How does it change the way you picture the kingdom to know that being made family is one of its first acts?

Self-Reflection Questions

- 1 When you pray, do you approach God more like a servant trying to perform well enough, or like a child who already belongs? What in your life has shaped that posture?
- 2 Say "Abba, Father" out loud. What did you notice as you said it: resistance, relief, or something else?
- 3 If your place in God's family was settled long before you ever asked, what is one area of fear or striving you could set down?