

Indwelt

THOSE WHO TRUST JESUS ARE INDWELT BY THE HOLY SPIRIT
WHEN THEY ARE ADOPTED INTO THE FAMILY OF GOD.

The Bible study class I teach recently decided to undertake a study of Acts. We are still in the first few chapters, but the class has already remarked on the startling transformation of Simon Peter. In Acts, Peter displays a maturity and boldness that he did not seem to possess in the closing chapters of the Gospels.

The class was particularly struck by Peter's behavior after the Pentecost event (Acts 2:1-13). Peter's sermons are impressive, but the class was more impressed by the gracious way Peter dealt with the crowd when any number of them must have participated in the call to crucify Jesus. Peter pointed out their guilt (2:22-23; 3:12-15), but then labeled their actions as "ignorance," shared the gospel with them, and welcomed them into the church (3:17-4:4; see 2:37-40).

Peter's behavior when confronted by the Sanhedrin, the same group that engineered the execution of Jesus, is also impressive. How could a man who denied knowing Jesus when confronted by a servant girl (Matt. 26:57-58, 69-75) have the courage to speak boldly when jailed and threatened by the high priest and the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5-20; 5:25-32)?

Many who note Peter's transformation often point to the Pentecost event as its explanation. And Peter was not the only one transformed and empowered by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the work of the Spirit is so prominent in Acts that some think it should have been labeled the Acts of the Spirit rather than the Acts of the Apostles.

The miracles done through Peter and others in Acts are impressive. But even more impressive is the personal transformations people experienced when converted and filled with the Spirit. And the same is true today. The Spirit guides believers in godly living (Rom. 8:1-11). The Spirit confirms and nurtures our relationship with the Father (vv. 12-17). The Spirit assures us God is at work in us and will continue to be in the future (vv. 18-25). The Spirit provides help in challenging situations, assuring us of ultimate victory in Christ (vv. 26-39). In today's session, Paul encouraged the Roman believers regarding the power and work of the Holy Spirit. May we find it as encouraging as Paul intended.

Romans 8:1-39

The dark tones in Paul's lament in chapter 7 about the struggle between the flesh and the spirit reflects the reality of the Christian life, but it is far from the whole story. Paul's description of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit in his own Christian life led him to lament "what a wretched man I am!" (7:24). But in spite of his ongoing struggle with sin, he did not live in despair. His struggle did not determine the end of his story, nor did he struggle alone. His own efforts would not deliver him from his "body of death," but the power of "God through Jesus Christ our Lord" would (vv. 24-25).

Deliverance from the power of the flesh leads directly into a full-throated celebration of the believer's victory in Christ (8:1-39). Those in Christ no longer are subject to the condemnation that the law calls for and our sin justifies. God in Christ has delivered believers from the penalty of our sin. By giving His Son "as a sin offering," He has given life to those who are in Christ (vv. 2-5). And those in Christ are now freed to walk in the Spirit rather than in the flesh. And walking with the "mindset" or "way of thinking" of the Spirit, we find true life and peace (v. 6).

Followers of Jesus are no longer obligated to the flesh. In Christ, we are free to live according to the Spirit. Those previously condemned to die because of their sin have in Christ "put to death the deeds of the body" and have found life as the children of God (vv. 9-14). This is the "rescue" (7:24) so desperately needed and the victory "through Jesus Christ our Lord" (v. 25) promised in the gospel.

Relationship (Rom. 8:14-17)

Paul repeatedly stressed for believers that the Spirit of God "lives in you" (vv. 9-11). The Spirit's influence is just as prominent in the believer as is the influence of the "flesh" (v. 4). And God has freed believers from their enslavement to the "mindset of the flesh" and enabled them to live guided by the "mindset of the Spirit" who indwells them (vv. 5-9). The presence and influence of the Spirit both informs and empowers the living of the Christian life (vv. 12-13).

VERSE 14

For all those led by God's Spirit are God's sons.

Those who are now in Christ are not just “free from the law of sin and death” (v. 2). They are also freed from the dominion of the flesh and freed to live according to the Spirit (v. 4). Paul used several different phrases to describe the consequences of conversion. He told those who are in Christ Jesus (v. 1) that “the Spirit of God lives in you” (v. 9), “Christ is in you” (v. 10), and “the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead” is in you (v. 11). As a result, believers can live following the “mindset of the Spirit” and turn away from the “mindset of the flesh” (vv. 5-6).

Turning away from flesh-led behavior and toward Spirit-led behavior is one hallmark of genuine Christianity. The change grows out of and reveals the relationship the person has with God. **All those led by God's Spirit** “have their minds set on things of the Spirit” (v. 5), and “by the Spirit” have “put to death the deeds of the body” (v. 13).

Paul often used familial terms to describe the Christian life. Those living in line with the mindset of the Spirit reveal that they are **God's sons**. These have not earned their place in God's family by their behavior. Rather, their behavior results from their relationship with the Father through Christ. And the phrase does more than just explain the behavior of believers. It also assures them of a loving relationship with God and implies a loving relationship with their brothers and sisters in Christ.

VERSE 15

For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear. Instead, you received the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father!”

Believers do not live “obligated to the flesh” (v. 12), but “led by God's Spirit” (v. 14) as God's sons and daughters. Stressing the same basic point, Paul described the believer's new relationship with God by contrasting the state of a slave against that of an adopted son.

Those who are in Christ ought not think of themselves as entering into an obligation similar to that they had to the flesh. **You did not**, Paul asserted, **receive a spirit of slavery** resulting in a state of **fear**. Greek in Paul's day did not use a mix of capital and lower-case letters, so in several passages, as here, there is debate whether or not to capitalize *spirit*. If capitalized (NIV), the sentence would explain that the Spirit who indwells believers does not promote a slavish, fearful relationship with God. Translated with a lower case (CSB, ESV, KJV) asserts that

the mood or state of mind produced by salvation ought not be one of fearful obligation.

Instead of a *spirit* of fear and obligation, Paul wrote, believers **received the Spirit of adoption**. Again, some translate this Greek term as “spirit” (NASB), indicating the state of mind resulting from salvation. Other translations (CSB, ESV, NIV) capitalize *Spirit*, stressing that the presence of the Holy Spirit confirms that God’s grace and the work of Christ have removed the barrier of sin and transcended the law. Paul previously emphasized that the Holy Spirit indwells believers, noting multiple times that the Spirit “lives in you” (vv. 9,11). Believers live not as slaves to sin or law but as children of God adopted into the family of God.

Only Paul used the Greek term for *adoption* to describe the believer’s relationship with God in the New Testament (Rom. 8:15,23; Gal. 4:5; Eph. 1:5). In Roman law, an adopted child entered a family with all the privileges of a child born into the family. Unlike the child by birth, the adopted child was chosen. They were made part of the family based solely on the will and affection of the father.

The believer’s new relationship with God as **Father** is so intimate that through the work of the Spirit **we cry out** to Him as our **Abba**. *Abba* was a term of endearment used within a close family circle. It implies a loving and nurturing relationship entirely different from one consisting of obligation and servitude.

VERSES 16-17

The Spirit himself testifies together with our spirit that we are God’s children, and if children, also heirs—heirs of God and coheirs with Christ—if indeed we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit himself confirms our sonship. **Testifies together** may also imply the giving of supportive or corroborating testimony. If the Spirit’s testimony is made along **with our spirit**, the verse is asserting that the Holy Spirit’s testimony corroborates the testimony of believers’ conscience that they are **God’s children**. *The Spirit* provides assurance of the state and status of *God’s children*. Therefore, believers can confidently approach God as Father. **If** (or “since”) believers are *God’s children*, then they are also **heirs of God**. As *heirs*, the children of God are assured that they will receive the abundant life and the eternal kingdom that God has promised.

Christians are also **coheirs with Christ**. Paul had already asserted this union with Christ should shape the way believers live in

the present (vv. 5-9). But this union also assures them they will share a future with Him.

Union with Jesus does not just involve the promise of a future inheritance. Those united with Christ will **suffer with him**. The same truth shows up in several of Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:5; Phil. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:10-12). If union with Christ leads to opposition and hardship similar to His experience, then that suffering is indicative of a genuine relationship with Him. Sharing Christ's suffering thus becomes evidence that the believer is united with Christ and will be **glorified with him**.

Explore Further

Read "Adoption" on pages 29–30 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What does being God's children

- teach us about ourselves and about our relationship with God?

Hope (Rom. 8:18-25)

Christians are God's children. As heirs of God and coheirs with Jesus, they will inherit the kingdom of God with all that entails. The full expression of that kingdom will be revealed in a future determined by God. The Christians' confidence in this assured future, their "hope" in God, helps them live with faithfulness in a fallen world.

VERSE 18

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

Paul assured his readers that those in Christ who suffer because of their connection with Him (v. 17) will be glorified with Him. **I consider** indicates a calculated conviction, the result of careful consideration. **Sufferings** could refer to suffering specifically for Christ's sake or suffering as a natural consequence of living in an imperfect world. And Paul certainly knew well all types of suffering (2 Cor. 6:3-10; 11:23-29).

The glory that is going to be revealed and the inheritance of the children of God (Rom. 8:15-17) are overlapping if not identical realities.

Comparing the sufferings of this present time to the future promised by God, Paul arrived at a compelling conclusion. He would pay any cost, suffer any hardship, endure any persecution to be part of the assured future promised to the faithful.

VERSE 19

For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed.

The believer is already part of the kingdom of God. But Christians continue to suffer in this fallen world because God has not yet transformed the whole of **creation** as He will in the age to come. Thus, the *creation eagerly waits with anticipation* for God's transforming action in the future.

Many scholars point out that some groups within creation, such as evil spirits, fallen angels, and pagan humanity, do not look forward with *anticipation* to God's future actions. At the same time, the Old Testament often personifies elements of creation. The trees sing for joy (Ps. 96:12). The wilderness will be glad (Isa. 35:1), and the mountains will sing (Isa. 55:12). As a result, many understand creation in this context to focus on the non-personal created order. At this future time, not only will fallen creation be restored, but also the true nature of the **God's sons** [children] will be **revealed** in full.

VERSES 20-21

For the creation was subjected to futility—not willingly, but because of him who subjected it—in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children.

The creation was subjected to futility. *Futility* refers to something existing or operating in vain or without purpose. God formed creation with a purpose, but humanity's sin left creation unable to fulfill its intended purpose.

Creation's futility was inflicted on it, not chosen **willingly**. The corruption of a fallen world was not something included in its creation. Material existence is not inherently bad as some philosophers in Paul's day taught. Rather, the curse fell on creation as part of the punishment for the sin of Adam (Gen. 3:17-19).

The futility came upon creation **because of him who subjected it**. God subjected creation to *futility* **in the hope** of its eventual deliverance

from **decay**. *Hope* describes a confident expectation of a future event promised by God. In the grand plan of God, subjecting creation to futility was never the end game. As the problem of sin was resolved in Christ, so also creation would be restored to the original purpose of God.

Creation's **bondage to decay** is temporary. Unfortunately, believers live in the corrupt depravity of "this present time" (Rom. 8:18) and their suffering is in part a result of that fact. Fortunately, creation will ultimately **be set free** by the power of God **into the glorious freedom of God's children**. A day will come when creation's *bondage to decay* will come to an end, and the age to come will begin. At that time, God will create a transformed world reflecting His purpose and that is consistent with *the glorious freedom of God's children*.

VERSES 22-23

For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits—we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For we know appeals to the common convictions held by believers. Paul's readers already knew about God's good creation. They knew about the fall and the bondage of sin, decay, and depravity. They certainly knew the suffering experienced by the children of God. But they also knew the promise of God's future transformation of the world, punishment of evil, and vindication of the righteous. These truths should allow God's children (of all times) to endure travails and transcend discouragement. Their pain is real, but rather than wallow in lament, they can anticipate the promised victory to come.

The whole creation, looking forward to God's promised rescue from futility (vv. 20-21), **has been groaning together with labor pains**. Paul intended the image to convey the groaning and suffering of a hardship endured in order to achieve a positive outcome.

Just as the creation endures in hope, so to do believers. **We also groan within ourselves**. *We ourselves* combined with *we also* provides a strong emphasis to the assertion about believers, and included Paul himself. The image of *labor pains* leading to childbirth encourages believers to look beyond their current difficulties, enduring them in anticipation of the future reward.

Christians live in confident expectation because we **have the Spirit as the firstfruits**. *Firstfruits* refers to a partial, first part of something

that represents the whole. In the Old Testament, *firstfruits* was used of the first portion of a harvest given to God to sanctify the whole (Lev. 23:10-11). Paul also used the term indicating a part representing a whole. But he generally used the word not of sacrifice but of the first portion of something which would come in its fullness at a later time (Rom. 11:16; 1 Cor. 16:15).

Used of God's gift of *the Spirit* to believers, *firstfruits* represents both a promise and a foretaste of a fullness yet to come (1 Cor. 15:20). Thus, the indwelling Holy Spirit provides a partial taste of the full experience that believers will enjoy in the age to come. At the same time the Spirit is evidence that God has begun a process that He has promised will be fulfilled in the future (Rom. 8:16-17). With the Spirit as firstfruits of God's plan, believers can eagerly and confidently await the full expression of their adoption (v. 15). The adoption received at conversion was real but was not yet fully expressed (1 John 3:2-3). Its completion awaits the return of Jesus, when Christians will also experience **the redemption of our bodies** (1 Cor. 15:20-23, 35-49; Phil. 3:21).

VERSES 24-25

Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

Paul could write of salvation as a past event, **we were saved**, a future event (5:9), and as a present reality (1 Cor. 1:18). Those saved at their conversion are secured and matured in their present and look forward to the future completion of their deliverance in the age to come. All three time frames are connected in that they are all one ongoing work of God. The believer at conversion begins a life lived in this hope. We live with the conviction that God will complete the good work He has begun in us (Phil. 1:6).

The Christian **hope** is a confidence in the future based in the truth of the gospel and the reliability of God. While God's promise is reliable, it has not yet come to pass. Paul expressed this by asserting that **hope that is seen is not hope**. In other words, *hope* by definition relates to future unseen events. That which a person sees is not something hoped for but something which has already come to pass.

Believers **hope for what we do not see**. But even though still unseen, believers would be foolish to give up on their hope even in the face of persecution and suffering (Rom. 8:17-18). For the Christian, *hope* is based on the reliability of God and validated by the possession of the firstfruits

of the Spirit (v. 23). Therefore, believers are right to **eagerly wait for it with patience**. The word translated *patience* refers to the ability to endure in the face of difficult situations. It involves fortitude and perseverance, not just calmly waiting for something. Believers are not just waiting on God to act. We are persevering through any and all difficulty because we are confident that God will act. The indwelling Spirit and the promises of a reliable God call for and justify faithfulness on the part of the people of God. Because of what we know He has done for us and what we know He will do, we can live lives of faith with confidence and in hope.

Explore Further

Read “Hope” on pages 765–766 in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Revised and Expanded*. What is the basis of the Christian hope, and how might this hope help you in times of adversity?

Help (Rom. 8:26-27)

The Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives confirms our relationship with God. As the “firstfruits” of God’s work, the Spirit’s presence also provides evidence that we are coheirs with Christ and that our participation in the promised kingdom of God is assured. But the Spirit is more than evidence of our relationship with God and an assurance of a glorious future. The Spirit also helps believers as they live in the present age.

VERSE 26

In the same way the Spirit also helps us in our weakness, because we do not know what to pray for as we should, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings.

The Spirit confirms the believer’s relationship with God (vv. 16-17). **In the same way**, *the Spirit* aids the believer’s efforts to live a godly life in the present in spite of the suffering he or she may experience (v. 18). The Roman believers, like Paul, certainly knew the hardships Christians could experience. At times, they may have felt that they were not strong enough to stand up against temptation, much less persecution. Paul encouraged them by assuring them that they were not alone.

The Spirit **helps us in our weakness**. At times, Christians may face hardships or challenges that seem too much for them. Believers may not even **know what to pray for** or how to solve such problems. But in such times, the believer can be certain that **the Spirit himself intercedes for us with inexpressible groanings**. Some take this to mean that the Spirit takes our needs to the Father in ways that exceed the limitations of human language. Others think that the Spirit takes what believers can only experience as *inexpressible groanings* and communicates them clearly to the Father on our behalf. Whichever Paul intended, the heart of his reassurance to his readers is the fact that *the Spirit himself intercedes for us*. Believers are never alone as they struggle to navigate their Christian journey, even in its rockiest moments.

VERSE 27

And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because he intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Paul next assured the Roman believers of the effectiveness of the Spirit's intercession by linking it to the knowledge and the will of God. **He who searches out hearts** was a common way of referring to the Father (Acts 1:24; 1 Thess. 2:4). And the fact that the Father **knows the mind of the Spirit** and that the Spirit intercedes **according to the will of God** guarantees the effectiveness of the intercession.

At all times and in every situation, the Holy Spirit is actively working in and for believers. He stands with them in their times of weakness and difficulty. He carries their greatest needs and deepest feelings to the Father, and the Father hears. He seeks to communicate and work out the will of God in the believer's life. We who follow Jesus can therefore be certain that we are never alone, even in the most challenging situations.

Explore Further

Have you ever felt inadequate to meet a challenge related to your Christian life? Are you struggling with something right now? Take this opportunity to pray about your need, your uncertainty, and your struggle to meet the situation. Know that the Spirit intercedes for you, and the Father hears. Wait patiently and listen for His answer.
