

The Privileges of the Children of God

Romans 8:14-17

March 18, 2018

Introduction:

Last year Karen received for her birthday the complete series of the old television show “The Little House on the Prairie.” We both loved that show when we were kids, and so we enjoyed watching it together as a family. One of the changes that take place in the Ingalls family during the show is they eventually adopt a street orphan named Albert. But as Albert moves into his new home in Walnut Grove, he has difficulty accepting the reality that he’s now a full member of the Ingalls family. Having been abandoned for so long, Albert finds it hard to accept that Pa Ingalls really does love him and that he’s as much a part of the Ingalls family as Mary, Laura, and the rest of the Ingalls children.

Now I’ve never been an orphan and I’ve never been adopted, so I don’t personally know what it would be like to be in such a situation, but I certainly can imagine it. What joy it must be to go from a place of being unwanted to being loved and accepted, to be given a new name, a new identity, and a sense of security and belonging. And what Albert experienced on a fictional TV show is what many have experienced in real life, who have been taken in by adoptive parents, who have loved them and provided them a new identity as members of their family. For those of you here who are adopted, you no doubt have a deep love and gratitude to your family who took you in and made you one of their own.

This idea of adoption is what stands behind the passage we’ll be looking at this morning. Paul uses this metaphor of adoption to describe what has taken place in us, we who were once spiritual orphans, living apart from God. In Christ, God takes us and adopts us as his own, so that we might bear his name as his children and share in all the privileges and benefits that come from being a child of God. This is perhaps one of the most wonderful passages of Scripture that communicate to us the true nature of our restored relationship with God we’ve received through Christ.

So let’s take a look at this soul-refreshing passage of Scripture as you open your Bibles to Romans 8. As always, my hope is that you would bring your own personal Bible with you each Sunday, but if you didn’t, I’d invite you to follow along in one of the hardcover Bibles we have available in the pew in front of you. Our passage today is Romans 8:14-17, which can be found on pg. 944 of the pew Bibles. Please follow along as I read, starting at v. 14. **“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.”**

As you can see, this passage is all about what it means for us to be a child of God but before we get into the details of that, we need to just let this amazing truth sink in for a moment. When God redeems us from our sin, he does more than simply set us free from

the punishment we deserve for our sin. We've talked quite a bit throughout Romans of God's wrath against sin and how Christ took our place, innocently suffering in our stead so that our guilt would be his guilt and his righteousness would be our righteousness. Now that's all true - no doubt about it - but it sounds so legal, so official, so courtroom-like. It can leave you with a cold, detached feeling. For example, I could be in a courtroom where a judge can declare me "not guilty" of a crime and tell me that I'm free to leave, but that doesn't mean the judge cares an onion for me personally. It simply means he reached his judicial sentence and now he can wash his hands of me.

But it would be an entirely different story if that judge welcomed me into his home, invited me to live with him and his family, and then adopted me as his son who would one day receive an inheritance from his estate. That's a whole different ball of wax! It's one thing for God to declare us "not guilty," but to declare us to be his son, to adopt us into his family, to make us heir of his riches - well, that goes beyond what anyone could possibly hope to expect from a human judge much less God, yet that is exactly what he has done.

So before we unpack the privileges that come with being a child of God, we need to first stand amazed at the simple truth of it! We are more than merely declared innocent: as Christians we've been adopted into God's family and he considers us to be his child. That is an utterly astonishing truth that we need to first come to grips with. But then to unpack that even more, I've identified five privileges given to us as a result of being adopted into God's family. What are the wonderful benefits and privileges that come from being made a child of God through faith in Christ? Let's walk back through the passage and take a look at what it means for us to now be members of God's family. The first one is this...

1. We have empowerment (v. 14)

Look at v. 14 once again. Paul says, "**For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**" One might assume that what Paul is referring to is people being led by the Spirit of God such that the Holy Spirit guides them into what job they should take or who they should marry, but that's not likely what he has in mind. Context helps us here, especially since the word "**for**" at the beginning of the sentence tells us that v. 13 and v. 14 are connected together. So let's read v. 13 and v. 14 together so you can better understand what Paul is communicating to us here. "**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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**"

So then, this isn't about being guided by the Holy Spirit in decision making or through esoteric experiences but rather it's about being empowered by the Holy Spirit to put sin to death and live righteously. To be "**led by the Spirit of God**" is to be about the business of putting to death the deeds of the body. In other words, a demonstrative characteristic of someone who is a child of God is that they're fighting sin and seeking practical righteousness through the power of the Spirit.

This can't be emphasized enough because so many people today claim everyone is a child of God simply by virtue of being a human being. You'll hear people say things like, "We're all God's children, each and every one of us." Well, you certainly are one of

God's *creatures* provided you're a human being, but that does not necessarily make you a child of God. Paul makes it clear here that one of the characteristics of being a son of God is you're led by the Spirit which contextually means you're someone who is waging war against sin. If you aren't doing that, then this passage isn't true of you. If you aren't led by the Spirit in resisting sin, fighting against temptation, and pursuing righteousness and instead are being led by your own sinful passions and lusts and cravings, indulging in sin with no concern for God's Word, then you aren't a child of God. As Jesus said to the Pharisees, you might be a child of a very different father, the father of lies, of Satan, but if you aren't being led by the Spirit into holiness, then you aren't a child of God.

A true child of God is led by the Spirit in resisting sin. So let me both encourage you and challenge you in this. First, I want to encourage you in that God does not save us from the consequences of sin only to leave us under its power. Salvation is both a future hope and a present reality. If you're a Christian, God has empowered you by giving you his Spirit so that sin no longer needs to enslave you. He has set you free so that you don't have to give into those sinful desires and passions which once ruled over you. You've been empowered by the Spirit to say "no" to sin and "yes" to righteousness.

So my friends, don't let sin rule over you. If you're dealing with some kind of habitual sin, you've been given power over it as a Christian. Maybe you've believed the lie that you are stuck with that sin, that you will never conquer it and that you just have to live with it the remainder of your life. That's a lie. As a Christian, you've been empowered by the Spirit to draw upon his power to help you resist sin and live righteously. So then, live in the power of the Spirit that has liberated you from sin's dominion and submit yourself to the Spirit, so you can put to death the deeds of the flesh and live for God.

But on the other side of the coin, there is a challenge in this as well. If you aren't being led by the Spirit in that you are willfully and deliberately engaging in sin and it doesn't matter much to you, then you need to be confronted with the flip side of this verse which is you aren't a child of God. Don't try to comfort yourself with popular notions that say we are all God's children. We aren't all God's children and specifically you aren't God's child if you refuse to be led by the Spirit into the pursuit of holiness. If all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, then the opposite is true: if you refuse to submit to the Lordship of Christ and continue to live according to your sinful desires, according to the pattern of this rebellious and wicked world, then you are under God's wrath and not his loving care as his son or daughter. A child of God is characterized by being led by the Spirit of God which means he or she is empowered to pursue the righteousness of God by putting sin to death and living to God's glory.

Now that's an important challenge to give during the first point of this message because I don't want to give the false impression that the wonderful encouragements that come from the rest of this passage are true of you if you are in fact refusing to submit to Christ and be led by his Spirit. What follows in this passage is true not for everyone on the face of the earth: it is only true of those who are sons of God as evidenced by living a life led by the Spirit away from sin and into an ever-increasing pursuit of holiness. So having said that, let's move on now. For those of us who are Christians, led by the Spirit, here's the second wonderful privilege we have as sons and daughters of God is that is...

2. We have security (v. 15a)

Look back in your Bibles at just the first half of v. 15. **“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear...”** As a child of God, you no longer need to live in fear. Fear of what? Fear of the wrath of God. Because of Christ, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, meaning there is nothing left to fear. Death has lost its sting because we don't need to fear that death will usher us to the throne of judgment but rather into the loving embrace of our Heavenly Father.

This is so important to me because I cannot think of anything I could possibly fear more than the wrath of God. As far back as I can remember, I have always had a fear of hell. I can imagine many terrible things that could happen to me: my wife or my children could suddenly die in a freak car accident; I could be captured and tortured; I could be falsely accused of a crime I didn't commit; I could suffer from a painful and debilitating illness for years upon years - all terrible things to be sure. But they pale in comparison with being in hell for all eternity, suffering forever God's wrath against my sins. What's a few decades of sickness or prison or even torture compared to an eternity of facing God's wrath in hell? There is nothing I fear more than to fall into the hands of an angry God.

But Paul tells me here I don't need to fear that ever again. When I became a Christian, I did not receive a spirit that would cause me to once again be afraid of what awaits me after death for my sins. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, so I can say, “Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?” I need not fear what lies beyond the grave because Christ paid it all. I don't need to be afraid of how God will judge my life because he has been fully satisfied in Christ, who lived the life I should have lived and died the death I should have died.

So God would have us rest in the security of knowing that fear of punishment, fear of rejection, fear of him as our judge, no longer needs to haunt us. You never need to fall back into the fear of condemnation because God has you securely in his grasp. If you are a Christian, then Jesus paid it all. There is no debt you need to pay. Every sin has been atoned for: both those you've committed in your past as well as those you have yet to do in the future. So my friends, don't fall back into fear because you have nothing to fear any longer in Christ. God's wrath against you has been fully satisfied and will never for any reason threaten you again.

But more than a lack of fear, our relationship with God has been entirely transformed by God's Spirit from what it once was. Whereas before we were rebels, enemies of God who were at war with him and under his judgment, now we have been given a rich intimacy with God through Christ. So moving on to the third benefit we possess...

3. We have intimacy (v. 15b)

Look at the astonishing things Paul says about us in v. 15. He says, **“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!’**

We've been adopted as sons. We aren't strangers to God. We aren't foreigners. We aren't people he begrudgingly saved whom he's indifferent about. He looks at us as sons, as his children. That's amazing! What can compare to the love a parent has for his children? It is fierce and tender, deep and longsuffering, patient and kind. I think of how much I love my own children and yet, my love is tainted with sin, but God loves us as his children without any stain of sin. How much deeper, richer, more passionate his love must be towards me! He has called me his son, adopted me into his family, and given me a love far surpassing any love between a father and a child here on earth.

Furthermore, he changes our hearts so that we also love him as well. Through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, we begin to cry out to God as "Abba! Father!" That is a term of intimacy, much like a child calling his father "Daddy." If you have had kids, you know one of the most precious first words you can hear them say is "Daddy" or "Mommy." Nothing is so delightful to the sounds of a parent's ear than to hear their child call them that. And here we have God inviting us to refer to him as "Daddy."

I can recall how after I first became a Christian how God transformed my heart to love him, to want to seek him, to experience his presence in my life. What Paul is speaking of here is an experiential truth, something that comes as a result of trusting in Christ. God is no longer abstract: he becomes a loving Heavenly Father. I know the reality of this in my life. My relationship with God was transformed into an intimate one of love and dependence and delight in him.

My friends, your relationship with God is meant to be intimate, like a father with his children. Maybe your earthly father wasn't like that to you, but your Heavenly Father has something far better for you. He saved you not just to allow you to escape the fires of hell but to enter into a close, loving relationship with you. Think of that! The creator of the universe has adopted you as his child and invites you to speak to him with intimate terms such as "Abba / Daddy."

This means God is not simply someone we merely believe in philosophically or as a set of doctrinal truths we affirm. We aren't to keep him at an intellectual distance. What Christ has done through the Holy Spirit is restore our relationship with God, so that we might not just know about him but know him, not just love theological truths about him but love him, not merely refer to him as God and Lord and Creator, but to cry out to him as Father, Abba, Daddy.

Can there be a more wonderful invitation to intimacy with God than this? God would have you come to him in prayer not as a creature or a philosopher or a theologian but as a child coming to his loving Heavenly Father, crying out to him in the most personal and intimate of terms. So if I might make a couple of applications here: first, view God as he wants you to view him. He's your Heavenly Father, your Abba. Even Jesus, when teaching us to pray, didn't begin "Our God, who is in heaven;" he began with the words, "Our Father..." He is indeed God and Lord and our Creator, but he is far more than that. Because he has adopted us as his children through faith in Christ, he is our Heavenly Father, our Abba, and so let that intimacy guide you in how you relate to him.

Do not view him as cold or indifferent or distant or abstract: he loves you as a Father loves his child and invites you to come to him with child-like trust and joy.

But then secondly, come to him. Is this not also a glorious invitation to prayer? Like a toddler who would crawl up into the safety and security of his father's lap, our Heavenly Father would have us come to him, to share our concerns, to find his security and love, to feel his presence. Have you been robbing yourself of this opportunity to come to your Heavenly Father each day? How would you feel if your children never came to you, never wanted to be with you, never shared their concerns with you? Would God feel any less than that when his children don't come to him? Find your way into the lap of your Heavenly Father through prayer. It brings to him joy and to you, security and love. God has saved you so you can know and love him as your Heavenly Father, so come to him daily in prayer so you can experience his loving presence.

I could almost stop right there because it's hard to imagine there could be any greater privilege than intimacy with God as our Heavenly Father, but Paul goes on to mention two more wonderful benefits that come through the Holy Spirit, so moving on now, let's give our attention to the fourth privilege we enjoy which is that...

4. We have assurance (v. 16)

In case we were prone to doubt the good news of our adoption into the family of God, Paul adds this in v. 16. **“The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...”** God doesn't want his children to second-guess their salvation. He wants to give us confidence that we are indeed children of God who are loved and secure in God's gracious acceptance of us through faith in Christ. So how does the Holy Spirit bear witness with our spirit that we indeed are God's children?

First, I think there's a subjective element to this. While it may not happen all the time, or even that frequently, there are times when God gives us a clear and abiding sense of his presence and his love in a way that cannot be explained. There is a peace that passes all understanding that comes to a believer, giving them comfort and assurance in times of trial. There have been times in my life that I have sensed God's presence and love for me, where I have sensed he is holding me fast in spite of the difficult circumstances I was facing. In prayer, I can be moved sometimes by God's Spirit to sense his deep love for me and the assurance that I've been called by him.

But I think God's Spirit also works through the outward evidence of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. So when I see myself growing in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and so on, I'm given assurance that God really is at work in me, that I have truly been transformed by his grace. Or when I see that I'm gaining victory over sin, that I'm progressing in my pursuit of holiness, that as time moves on I'm continuing to fight sin and forgive others and submit to Christ, then I gain the assurance that my salvation is real. I'm not just saying one thing and doing another. I'm not being a hypocrite, behaving one way for show around others yet all the while concealing a completely different person when no one is around. God's Spirit really is within me, empowering me to resist temptation and live righteously.

So then, God doesn't simply save us and let us guess at what happened. When he redeems us and adopts us into his family, he gives us the Holy Spirit so that we can have assurance in our heart of hearts that this is a reality: that God does indeed love us, that we are his children, and that our sins are forgiven. He wants us to rest in the confidence that we are forever his adopted children. But there is one more privilege that comes to us because of our adoption as sons of God that we need to talk about from this passage and that is...

5. We have an inheritance (v. 17)

Look back in your Bible now at what Paul says in v. 17. **"... 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."** Much like someone who is a child is poised to receive an inheritance in the future, so also are we heirs of what God has for us in Christ.

So what are we to inherit? Well, Paul's going to use this idea as a launching point into what he's going to say in v. 18 and following, which we'll be looking at next week, but without stealing too much of my own thunder, our inheritance includes both a glorified, resurrected body and a new creation that will be free from the death, decay, and the suffering we experience in this life. Now we'll talk more about that in the sermon next Sunday, but for now I think it's important to see that with our adoption as sons of God, comes the promise of a future inheritance that awaits us.

Of course, to be heirs of God means there is a future-focus of our lives as Christians. We don't possess that inheritance yet, but it's coming to us. For example, my three girls will one day inherit what now belongs to me and Karen. Sometimes my girls get a little ahead of themselves and try to stake out their claim on certain items ahead of time, but as my children, they will one day be the heirs of all that I possess. But what they stand to gain from me pales in comparison to what we have promised to us as children of God. The way Scripture speaks of the new heavens and the new earth makes anything I could pass on to my girls sound like junk! What is the value of my house or cars or my savings or anything else I possess in comparison to the riches of our Heavenly Father who owns all things and of Christ Jesus who has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us? What can compare to the promise of eternal life, of being in the presence of God, free from sin and sorrow forever? That is the glorious inheritance of the children of God, awaiting all who have trusted Christ. It is an inheritance kept in heaven for you and is not subject to stock market crashes, or fires, or rust, hurricanes, or tornados, or anything else that could in any way diminish or destroy it.

But we need to remember that this is a future promise, and just like an inheritance we would hope to receive here on earth, we don't yet have it. Before the crown comes a cross and so Paul says at the end of v. 15 that we indeed are heirs, **"provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."** Participation in the glory of Christ means we first must participate in the suffering of Christ. To be a child of God means one must identify with Christ, but Jesus warned us we would not be greater than our master: that if he suffered rejection and persecution, so also would

those who followed him. The path that leads to glory travels right through suffering and there is no short-cut to get around it.

Too many false preachers these days promise a suffering-free life, that if you follow Christ, instead of suffering you will have prosperity and peace. They show off their expensive suits and sports cars, their multi-million dollar mansion and private jets to convince you that the road to glory is paved with gold and other worldly riches, if you would only put certain principles into practice (as well as make a nice donation to their ministry). But this isn't what Scripture says. Yes, we're promised a rich inheritance in Christ, but we must suffer with him first. We must take upon ourselves the shame and rejection that come with following Christ in this wicked and perverse generation. We must first take up the cross before we get to take up our crowns.

Yet it is this promised inheritance that strengthens us to do just that. Like Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, so also can we endure ridicule and shame, suffering and persecution, and even imprisonment and death if need be, because we can trust that our Heavenly Father has made us heirs of his kingdom. God holds out the staggering promise of the glorious riches of heaven so that we can endure whatever this world might throw at us in these few short years we walk this earth.

Conclusion

So then, we have seen throughout this passage five wonderful privileges we've received as children of God. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit, we have security in knowing that we will never again fall under God's judgment for our sins, we have intimacy with God, coming to him as our "Abba Father" who loves us as his adopted child, we have the assurance through God's Spirit that we are indeed his chosen children, and finally we have the privilege of being heirs of all the riches of heaven.

So my friends here at Grace Fellowship, rest in that. Take joy in that. Find peace and comfort and delight in knowing that as a Christian, you are more than merely saved from hell. You are a child of God. Let that glorious truth of your identify in Christ take root in your soul. Your Heavenly Father has adopted you into his family and made you an heir of his everlasting kingdom. Though we may suffer for a time, there awaits us an eternal home that we will inherit along with a glorified body that will be fit to be with Christ our God forever and ever. This is true of you as a Christian and God never lies.

May you find the deepest of joy and the richest of comforts in knowing God is your gracious Heavenly Father and you are his child through faith in Christ. Let's pray.

This sermon was addressed originally to the people at Grace Fellowship of Waterloo, IA by Pastor Rob Borkowitz. Copyright 2018.