

IN CHRIST: A SON OF GOD

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In one sense every man is a child of God. The apostle Paul said in Acts 17, "We are all the offspring of God." In that sense we are all the children of God. But in another very special sense God has chosen out of humanity a group of people who are the true children of God. Who are the true children of God?

Romans 8 is a high point of Romans. All that Paul has said before leads to the thoughts that he presents in this magnificent chapter. It is a mountain peak in the book. If I were to give a title to Romans 8, I would call it "The Blessings of Being in Christ," or, to put it in the form of a question, "What Does It Mean to Be in Christ?" Throughout this chapter Paul presents the blessings of being in Jesus Christ.

He began by showing us that when one is in Christ he is no longer under condemnation. He said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Before one comes into Christ he is lost; he is under the condemnation of God. But the Christian has come out of the world and into Christ. He is no longer under the sentence of death.

We will pursue further what it means to be in Christ.

I. LED BY THE SPIRIT

The second blessing of being in Christ is that we are sons of God. When one is in Christ he is a child of God in a very significant way. Notice what Paul says, "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." The first important point that Paul makes is this: The sons of God are led by the Spirit. That is an interesting statement Paul makes. He is speaking, of course,

of the Holy Spirit—the third person of the Godhead. He says that those who are the children of God are *led by the Spirit*. What does that mean? As always when we ask a biblical question, we must seek to find biblical answers.

During the ministry of Jesus, as recorded in John 6:44, 45, Jesus said, "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws Him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught of God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me." Nobody comes unless God draws them. But everyone who is drawn has heard and learned of the Father. John 6:44-46 is an important passage in regard to what Paul says in Romans 8 about being led by the Spirit. Everyone who is drawn of God must come into contact with the message of God, the gospel. When one hears the gospel, when he responds in the right way to the gospel, he is drawn unto God. This is the way the Holy Spirit leads the alien sinner to the salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit does not announce by a vision, a dream, or an experience to an alien sinner that God has made that alien His son. That did not happen in the New Testament, and it does not happen today. If we are to be led by the Spirit we must hear the message of the Spirit; the message of the Spirit is the gospel of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 2 the apostle Paul said, "Which things also we speak, not in the words that man's wisdom teaches, but in the words that the Holy Spirit teaches." The apostle was affirming that what he preached and wrote for God he was given by the Holy Spirit. I believe this to be true. In the first century inspired preachers shared

the message of God with alien sinners. In the first century that message was in inspired men. Those men, selected by God, were guided by the Holy Spirit in writing down that message. Their message we now have in the New Testament. If we are to learn of God we must learn the message that those inspired men spoke and wrote down in the first century. In the first century the message was in inspired men. Today the message is in an inspired volume.

This is the way the Holy Spirit leads a man from out of Christ into Christ. The method of the Spirit has not changed since the first century. Let me demonstrate that truth. In the first century, those who went forth preaching were guided and directed by the Holy Spirit in presenting God's message. Between the Holy Spirit and the alien sinner there was always a messenger. When one looks at the growth of the early church as it unfolds in Acts, he will find about eight major cases of conversion; that is, eight stories of how people came out of the world into Christ. In each of those stories there was always a human messenger who came to the alien. That human messenger came with the Word of God, the message of the Spirit. When people learned from those messengers what to do to be saved they were learning the Spirit's message, and they were being led by the Spirit.

Today, there is the inspired volume. One must come to know the message that is in the New Testament. He either must be taught by somebody else, or he must learn it for himself through his personal study. The point is this: Between the Holy Spirit and the alien sinner—the lost man—there is the inspired message. Therefore, the Holy Spirit does not come directly into the heart of the alien sinner. He does not come directly to the lost man to announce to him how to be saved or that he is saved. If you want to know how to be saved, then you need to know the gospel.

In the book of Revelation (2, 3) the Lord Jesus Christ instructed John to write letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. At the conclusion of each of those letters there are the important words: "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Jesus instructed John to write. John wrote. The message was sent to the churches. John wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Lord Jesus says,

"Let the churches hear what the Spirit says to the churches." What John wrote was the Spirit's message. It was as though the Spirit Himself were speaking to those churches.

Romans 8:14 says the children of God are those who are led by the Spirit—the children of God are those who hear the message and respond to that message. It is the Spirit's message. When men accept it they will be led by the Spirit. Jesus said, "They shall all be taught of God, and every man therefore who has heard and learned of the Father comes unto Me." If there is no teaching, no hearing, no learning there is no coming. Paul says, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." If you would be a child of God, you must come to the Scripture and hear what the Spirit has to say and accept His message.

II. FREED BY THE SPIRIT

A second point is made by Paul in verse 15. He shows that because we are the sons of God we have *not received "the spirit of slavery leading to fear again."* He says, "We are not under bondage and fear." We are not like slaves anymore. We are not afraid anymore. Why? Now we are God's children. The important point that Paul is making is this: Before one becomes a Christian he is in bondage to sin. Jesus said, "Every one who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:32-34). The man out of Christ lives under bondage. Under bondage there is every reason to be afraid. We are under condemnation and alienated from God. But now in Christ we are no longer condemned. Now in Christ we are the sons of God. Therefore, our response to God is not like bond slaves. It is not to be a response of fear.

What does all this mean to us? When we become Christians we are the servants of Jesus Christ. But we do not serve simply out of fear, as a slave would serve. We do not serve Christ because we have to. We serve Him because we get to. It is a privilege to be a child of God. The bondservant who serves out of fear is always asking the wrong questions. The person who serves God out of fear as a bond slave will ask, "Do I have to go to church?" or "Do I have to partake of the Lord's Supper?" or "Do I have to give a certain per cent of my income back to God?" Those are the wrong questions. It is not, "You have to"; it is, "You get to." The child of

God is the one who wants to meet with the other children of God in worship. He does not come to the place of worship as a slave, but as a true child of God. He does not ask, "Do I have to partake of the Supper?"; he gets to. He does not ask, "Do I have to give a certain amount?"; he gets to. There is a difference in attitude. I am fearful that many never get beyond the level of slavery and fear. They are asking, "How little can I do and still get by?" That is not the point. The point is that as a child of God you want to do everything you can to the glory of God.

Jesus used the motivation of fear to encourage people to respond to Him. As a matter of fact, Jesus taught more about hell than anybody else in the New Testament. If one will not respond to Christ except out of fear, let him respond out of fear. I believe that he can make his initial response to Christ because he is afraid of the consequences of sin; but I do not believe that the growing Christian can serve Christ all of his life simply because of fear. He needs to come to the place that he is serving Christ because of joy. "It is not a spirit of slavery leading to fear again," Paul says, "but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Abba, Father!' God is our Father. He has adopted us into His family. Now our attitude is this: 'I want to do all that I can to His glory.'"

Paul says we are led by the Spirit; we must hear the Spirit's message in the New Testament. We are not under bondage and fear any longer, but we have received the spirit of adoption. We can say with great meaning, "Our Father who art in heaven." The adoption into the Father's family changes our motivation for service. We serve because we want to do all that we can in the name of our Father.

III. ASSURED BY THE SPIRIT

At verse 16 Paul says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." Here again is a vital statement: "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit*

that we are the children of God." Paul did not say the Spirit bears witness to our spirit. Rather he said, "The Spirit bears witness *with* our spirit." What does that mean? The Holy Spirit has revealed in the New Testament how to be a child of God. When we do what the Spirit asks us to do, we become the children of God. We have the Spirit's message showing us how to be a child of God; we also have our own spirit saying we have obeyed the Spirit's message. For example, in every case of conversion in Acts, it is apparent that the people heard the gospel. The Spirit's Word says, "Hear the gospel." Have you heard the gospel? If you have, the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you have heard. In the cases of conversion in Acts it is evident that the people believed the message. How would we know to believe the message except that the message asks us to believe? The Spirit shows us we are to believe. Have you believed? If so, the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you have believed. In Acts people repented of their sins. How would we know to repent except that the Spirit revealed it? Have you repented? When you repent, the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you have repented. In every one of those stories of conversion in Acts, people were baptized in water. They were immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. The Spirit says, "Be baptized." Have you been baptized biblically? If you have, the Spirit bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God.

CONCLUSION

The witness of the Spirit is not something better felt than told. It is a clear, concise message. When you are in harmony with that message, the Spirit bears witness with your spirit. The final word is this: If we are children of God then we are heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. God has a wonderful inheritance for everyone of His children. That is what it means to be in Christ. We can know if we are a child of God by following the simple precepts of His holy Word.