



The Holy Spirit tends to get a lot of press in churches but it's not always good. Here are a couple of the more [bizarre examples](#).

I think you already know this, but when I talk about the power of the Holy Spirit, I don't mean anything close to what these folks mean. But we do have Holy Spirit power available to us. But not only is this power not at all like these crazy examples. Not only is the power of the Holy not like a power source that you sort of plug into. So many people who talk about the Spirit's power make this power sound like an impersonal force and that if we only learn to control it, we could tap into something amazing.

The Holy Spirit is not a force. the Holy Spirit is the third member of the trinity. the Holy Spirit is a person and this person has already given us what we need for life and godliness. Last Sunday we covered six points and this morning we will cover two more. First, let's read the passage and I will remind you of what we did so far.

*12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** of God. 15 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!" 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are **children** of God, 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.*

1. Walking according to the Spirit
2. Living according to the Spirit
3. Indwelt by the Spirit
4. Alive because of the Spirit
5. Resurrection by the Spirit
6. Debtors to the Spirit (12-13)

7. Led by the Spirit (14)

*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. 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** of God.*

You have to admit that verse 13 sounds like something we have to actively do. We have to put to death the deeds of the body so that we can live. So here we have two Christians. The first is actively putting to death the deeds of the body and he lives for all eternity. But over here we have another believer who is not actively putting to death the deeds of the body and is living according to the flesh. The end result of this person is death, and as we learned last week, that means eternal death. Is that what this verse is teaching? When I draw out the consequences like that, it doesn't sound right, does it? But at first glance it does seem like something that we are actively doing?

But it is not. As we learned last week--and this is why I reviewed last Sunday's points--true believers do not live according to the flesh. If you missed last week's message you'll have to go back and check out this point, because it is important. We can struggle with our flesh, as is obvious from Romans chapter 7, but believers do not--cannot--live according to the flesh. We don't walk according to the flesh and we don't live according to the flesh because of the Holy Spirit. We have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. We have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. Again, it's not at all to say that we do not have an ongoing war with our sinful nature that drags us down, but this verse is not talking about that.

Verse 14, then, is another summary of this truth. *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** of God.* Are Christians led by the Spirit? Yes, we are. Again, you've got to remember that these are positional truths. They are true about us regardless of what we do or don't do. This is the wonderful beauty of Biblical truths like this. Experientially we can move in and out of being led by the Holy Spirit on a daily basis but positionally speaking, it can never change.

To illustrate this further, let's take verse 14 and alter it slightly.

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are **sons** of God.*

We can reverse this and say that all who are sons of God are led by the Spirit. it would also be accurate to say that all of those who are not sons of God are not led by the Spirit. These are positional truths given to us--guaranteed to us--by the Holy Spirit himself.

This verse also introduces our next and final point for the morning.

8. Adopted by the Spirit (14-17)

Before we get very far, let me ask a simple question. Do you think being adopted by the Spirit is a positional truth or an experiential truth? If it were an experiential truth, it would mean that one

day you are a child of God and the next day, when things are going so well, you would be kicked out of God's family. And this is what it is like for those who believe that a person can lose their salvation. I am not suggesting that anyone teaches that you move in and out of salvation on a daily basis, but here's the thing about this awful doctrine. No one can tell you what it takes to actually lose your salvation, right? They can more or less tell if you have regained your salvation as a person would have to have some kind of repentance, maybe going forward at an altar call again. So if you don't know what it takes to lose your salvation, then you can never know if you have actually lost it or not. And if you can lose your salvation once, you can lose it twice...or three times or many more times.

But in direct opposition to those who teach that you can lose your salvation, being adopted by the Spirit results in a permanent relationship with our heavenly Father. *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 concept of adoption is rooted in many Old Testament stories. Before Abraham had a son with his wife Sarah, and even before he took Hagar as his wife who bore him Ishmael, Abraham adopted Eliezer as his heir. Abraham had no other heir so in that case, the son of a slave woman became his heir. This was not God's will per se, but nevertheless, it was a meaningful, binding event.

Moses was the prince of Egypt because he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. She had pity on the poor Hebrew baby floating in the Nile and took Moses into her home and raised him as her own son. Until he learned otherwise, the daughter of Pharaoh was every bit his real, flesh and blood mother.

Samuel was another child who was adopted in the Old Testament. Every so often, we have child dedications and asks that parents dedicate their children to the Lord and dedicate themselves to raising their children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We call that a child dedication and we usually model it after what Hannah did with Samuel but in many ways, the two dedications are worlds apart. Hannah literally turned over her right to raise Samuel, the son of her promise, to Eli. Eli wasn't exactly Father of the Year material and Samuel turned out to be a far superior son than Eli's own biological sons, Hophni and Phinheas.

After her parents died, Esther was adopted by her uncle Mordecai. He raised her with an overarching view of God's sovereignty. This helped prepare Esther to become queen of the vast and powerful Medo-Persian Empire and save her people from annihilation.

One adoption that is often overlooked is that of Mephibosheth. Though Mephibosheth was a grown man at the time. in every sense of the term, King Davud adopted him as his own son.

Then the king called Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "All that belonged to Saul and to all his house I have given to your master's grandson. 10 And you and your sons and your servants shall till the land for him and shall bring in the produce, that your master's grandson may have bread to eat. But Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall always eat at my table." Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants. 11 Then Ziba said to the king, "According to all that my

lord the king commands his servant, so will your servant do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons.(2 Samuel 9:9-11)

There are many parallels between the adoption of Mephibosheth and our own adoption by the Spirit.

- He was given a large inheritance--"all that belonged to Saul" (9:9) As sons of the eternal king, we have our own inheritance, don't we?
- The adoption was motivated by kindness--9:3- *And the king said, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?* Mephibosheth was the son of David's dear friend, Jonathan. The kindness that David had wanted to show to Jonathan was transferred to Mephibosheth. In the same way, God is motivated by love and kindness in adopting us as his children.
- The adoption was given to someone who was undeserving. Mephibosheth referred to himself as "a dead dog such as I." (9:8) We were completely undeserving when we were adopted by the Spirit.
- Adoption was given to an imperfect, crippled man. *“There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in his feet.”(9:3)* Under the sacrificial system, only a lamb without blemish was acceptable. Under the old covenant, a priest could not have any deformities. *16 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 17 “Speak to Aaron, saying, None of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the bread of his God. 18 For no one who has a blemish shall draw near, a man blind or lame, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, 19 or a man who has an injured foot or an injured hand* (Leviticus 21:16-19). Especially by the standards of their day, Mephibosheth was less than a man, crippled and unable to provide for himself, let alone others. nevertheless, David looked beyond that and made him part of his family.
- Adoption was given to a former enemy. As a member of Saul's family, Mephibosheth was part of David's sworn enemy. I can only guess that when he was called into David's presence that he expected something bad to happen. In the same way, you and I were literally God's enemy. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10).
- Adoption brought him into an intimate relationship with David. You "shall always eat at my table" (10) In his famous Psalm 23 King david wrote, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies." In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." There are many benefits to adoption, but as a child of God, there is an intimate relationship that begins.¹

Here's a question for you. Could God could have saved us from hell but not brought us into a personal relationship with himself? You see, if we only understand salvation in a clinical sense, then all that God did was to save us from hell. He took our sins away and guaranteed us eternal life, as if it that were not enough, but salvation is all about relationship. And the opposite is true. Hell is not just a place. It is an absence of relationship with God. Our adoption by the Holy Spirit captures this idea of an intimate, eternal relationship.

Verse fifteen says it is an "adoption as sons, so what do we do with the girls--are they left out somehow? Of course they are not, but you need to understand that the phrase "adoption as sons" is only one word in the Greek--adoption. Furthermore, the word for adoption contains the word "son." (υιοθεσία (*huiiothesia*)) So adoption essentially means 'sonship.' I think that's important because the word adoption can also sound kind of clinical. In our day, and even in ancient times, a legal process was always a key part. There may not have been reams of paperwork to fill out, but there was an official, legal process.

Spirit-powered adoption is also a legal process. When we are redeemed and justified, this is a legal process. Often times justification is called a forensic truth--a legal truth. We are declared innocent and then Christ's righteousness is credited to our account. If someone credited your bank account with \$100,000, that would be a legal process, right? Unless you were laundering money from your offshore casino business or something crazy like that. If you have trusted Christ alone for salvation, you are legally saved, forensically saved. But it is so much more than a legal document, isn't it?

When we witness to others we often ask them, "Do you have a personal relationship with the Lord"? The phrase personal relationship with the Lord is found nowhere in the Bible, but probably the closest thing to it would be our spiritual adoption. We are made sons and daughters of the king. It is not just adoption, it is sonship. We are granted the privilege of being a child of the sovereign king of the universe. We instantly enter into this relationship with our Father. Which is why verse 15 says, *by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"*

You have probably heard that the word Abba is Aramaic for the word 'daddy' or 'papa.' I hate to burst your bubble, but here is some excellent scholarship on the word.

In the Aramaic language of the time of Jesus, there was absolutely no other word [than Abba] available if Jesus wished to speak of or address God as father. Naturally such speaking of and addressing thereby would lose its special character, for it is then indeed the only possible form!²

It is fair to say that abba in Jesus' time belonged to a familiar or colloquial register of language, as distinct from more formal and ceremonious language. . . . But in any case it was not a childish expression comparable with 'Daddy': it was a more solemn, responsible, adult address to a Father. ³(p. 46)

So it doesn't technically mean "daddy," but let me explain why I think it is still a very intimate expression. Paul says that we *cry*, Abba, Father. Here are several uses of the word for cry.

FEAR: Mark 6:48-49- *And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out,*

ANGER: John 19:12- *From then on Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar."*

DESPERATION: Matt 9:27- *And as Jesus passed on from there, two blind men followed him, crying aloud, "Have mercy on us, Son of David."*

It's obvious that the word cry is filled with emotion. That emotion is not fear because we are told that *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!"* This emotion is not anger. There's not a hint of anger in this cry for our Father. It's not fear and it's not anger. This is a guttural, emotionally charged, desperate plea for your Father. It's desperate cry of a small child looking for his father. It's the determined cry of a young girl who needs nothing and no one except her daddy. You see, while the word 'abba' itself does not strictly mean "daddy," if it was spoken by a small child, that is exactly what it would mean. We don't just say the words, abba, Father. We cry out for abba, Father. And we cry out because we know he will be there. We plead for his presence because he cannot leave us. He will not forsake us. He will never turn his back on us...because we are his. We are his son. We are his daughter.

And he is our Father--and this drills home into the foundation of adoption--he is our Father because he chose us to be his child. This is the essence of what sonship is all about. being a son or daughter is being chosen by the Father to be his son or daughter. Listen to how John Stott described it.

In the Roman world of the first century AD an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father's affection more fully and reproduce the father's character more worthily."⁴

Did you catch that? An adoptee is "Deliberately chosen by his father." Before I told you that the word adoption means 'sonship' but there's more here as well. The one word has two parts which means a son who is placed.⁵ In other words, a chosen son. One who is deliberately chosen, purposely selected. This is what Paul meant when he wrote about adoption in Ephesians. *In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved* (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Do you see all the more why Paul started this chapter the way that he did? *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.* This is not an experiential truth, it is a positional truth. It is true because of what the Holy Spirit has done for us. However, like all positional truths, it is meant to be experienced. How do we experience the truth of our spiritual adoption?

To some degree, everyone is influence in their view of our heavenly Father based upon their relationship with their earthly father. If your earthly father was less than stellar, this can affect the way you think about God. But we've got to jettison this false thinking and focus on the pure relationship we have with our Father.

Also, this can affect the way we fathers parent our children. Not that we will ever attain to Godly perfection, but our Father demonstrates what it means to love a son and daughter.

Understanding our sonship will also help us to repent when we sin. Not only will we not feel condemned when we sin, but we will have the courage to repent. If I need to repent but think that at some level my status as a child of God will be affected, I am less likely to repent. I don't want to be rejected so I hold onto my sin. But a proper experience of sonship will give us the relational security and safety to be willing to repent, to approach God's throne and still be every bit his child as before we sinned.

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¹ Credit to John MacArthur for these OT examples and allusions between Mephibosheth and our adoption.

² Georg Schelbert, *ABBA Vater*.

³ *Journal of Theological Studies*, James Barr (vol. 39, 1988), "Abba Isn't Daddy", p. 46.

⁴ John Stott, *Romans*, InterVarsity Press, 1994, p. 232.

⁵ <http://forums.carm.org>, The Meaning of υιοθεσία