

Introduction

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His Person

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His Works

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His Indwelling

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His Baptizing

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His Sealing

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His Gifting

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His Helping

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The Holy Spirit—Our Helper

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, February 19, 2012

The Spirit--The Witness of Our Identity

*Under His wings I am safely abiding,
Though the night deepens and tempests are wild,
Still I can trust Him; I know He will keep me.
He has redeemed me, and I am His child. ¹*

In our last lesson, we began the closing section in our study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit by exploring some of the wonderful ways He serves as the divine “Helper” of the saints that He indwells. This morning, we take up the subject of the Spirit’s witness to His people of their identity in Christ.

A key passage for this subject is Romans 8:15-17; “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, “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 joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”²

In these words, we can see . . .

I. THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS OF THIS MINISTRY OF THE SPIRIT.

A. To fully understand the basis of this ministry, we need first to understand what our condition was without it. Paul writes that, in having received the Holy Spirit, we have not received what once characterized our condition before God. “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear . . .” (v. 15a). The word “spirit” that is used here is the same word that is also used in respect to the Holy Spirit (*pneuma*). But in this case, the word refers to an attitude, or a feeling, or perhaps even an actual experience, of “bondage . . . to fear”. That bondage, according to this context, comes from that sense of condemnation that resulted from our failure to keep God’s law perfectly by the power of the flesh; which in turn leads to the constant fear that we are unacceptable to God and are under the threat of His wrath (see vv. 12-13). In this “bondage”, someone is constantly driven to “perform” in obedience to the strict requirements of the law--and must constantly fail and incur guilt before the holy Law-Giver. But praise God that “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). This “spirit” of bondage once dominated us; who were among those “who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15); but we are not given this spirit “again” in Christ; “For God has not given us a spirit of fear . . .” (2 Timothy 1:7). Without this precious ministry of the Holy Spirit, we would not know this blessed freedom from bondage to fear that we now enjoy as sons and daughters of God in Christ by grace.

B. The basis of this ministry, then, is that we have now instead received “the Spirit of adoption . . .” (v. 15b). Because the same word is used here (*pneuma*); and because the original language does not capitalize the words as it is in most of our English translations, this word--by itself--can refer either to the Holy Spirit or to an attitude or experience. But because the work of the divine Person (the Holy Spirit) is described in the next verse, “Spirit” in verse 15 obviously refers to Him. He Himself not only brings about the experience of adoption, but is Himself the seal of it! Because of His presence in His saints, they are objectively identified as those who are adopted by God--those who were once “not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy”

(1 Peter 2:10). Just as is true in any adoption, it was an act of grace on the part of the parent. In eternity past, our Father “predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Ephesians 1:5). In our present experience, His Son Jesus “has redeemed those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Galatians 4:5). And with respect to its full future fulfillment, “we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23). Because of our having received the Spirit of adoption, we are now justly free to refer to the almighty God--the Maker and Sovereign of all--in the most intimate terms of love--“Abba, Father”. We are adopted in the fullest sense! What a blessed “identity” we now have!

II. THE EXPERIENTIAL WAY THIS MINISTRY IS ADMINISTERED TO US.

- A. Our new identity as adopted sons and daughters of God could not--in any way--be something that we would know simply on the basis of our own rational processes. In fact, it would be the greatest presumption imaginable for sinners such as us to simply declare ourselves “adopted of God”, or even assume it to be true on the basis of our own will. But as Paul writes, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . .” (v. 16). Could there be any higher Authority than that? As Samuel Ridout has written; “He does not leave the child’s feeble voice alone. We might often be tempted to doubt the testimony of our own renewed hearts, for the testimony is oftimes very feeble; sometimes it is but the cry of the child--’an infant crying in the night, and with no language but a cry.’ But the Spirit unites His mighty testimony with the feebleness of ours. He bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God, and gives His value to both testimonies. Can we then doubt?”³
- B. This witness from the Holy Spirit is powerfully authoritative. We readily receive the testimony of men; but as the apostle John wrote, “If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater . . .” (1 John 5:9). And the Spirit truly does bear witness to us of our identity in Christ. As Paul wrote, “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:11-12). How does this happen? Certainly, there is a subjective experience of the Spirit’s witness--when the Spirit bears His witness directly to our spirits. But there is also an important objective experience of His witness; and that is through our faith in the “exceedingly great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4) that the Spirit has preserved for us in the pages of Scripture.

III. THE SPIRITUAL REALITIES THIS MINISTRY AFFIRMS TO US.

- A. One of the realities affirmed to us by the Spirit’s assurance of our adoption is what was mentioned in the verses that precede our passage above. We are now, as God’s children, led by the Spirit and thus set free from the binding, death-producing “law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2). Paul writes, “Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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 as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Romans 8:12-14). We are motivated--because of the Spirit’s testimony of

our identity--to behave as the children of God, not in order to become God's children, but because that's what we already are!

- B. Another spiritual reality that the Spirit's ministry affirms to us is the promise of complete conformity to the image of Christ in heavenly glory. As John wrote, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:1-3).

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When a child feels fearful or insecure in a hostile world, it's a great comfort whenever he or she is scooped up into the arms of a loving parent and assured, "I love you and will never stop. Don't be afraid. No matter what, you are my child--and you will always be my child." That's what the Holy Spirit has been sent to do for us on behalf of our Father. When Jesus rose from the grave, He declared, "I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God" (John 20:17); and the Spirit will remain with us and assure us that Jesus' words are true until the day we finally are with Him in His Father's house forever!

¹Under His Wings, by William O. Chushing, public domain.

²All Scripture readings are taken from *the Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

³Samuel Ridout, *The Person and Work of The Holy Spirit* (John Ritchie, Kilmarnock, n.d.), p. 56.