

**Children of God**  
**Romans 8:14-17**  
**#29 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans**  
**Faith Community Church – May 14, 2006**

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Objective: *To identify the work of the Spirit in the Christian's life, and to encourage believers with the security that God has provided through Christ.*

**Introduction** – Please turn to Romans 8.

1. Romans 8 is about two major, yet related themes.
  - a. The first main theme in Romans 8 has to do with the Holy Spirit and His place in the life of the person who has trusted in Christ. Paul's discussion of the Holy Spirit leads to the second main theme:
  - b. The second theme in Romans 8 is assurance. This is the teaching that “. . . Christians can know that they truly are Christians and that, because they are, nothing will ever separate them from the love of God.”<sup>1</sup>
2. In Romans 8:1-13, Paul has informed us of two important points relating to the work of the Holy Spirit:
  - a. The power that the Spirit provides to deal with sin (1-11).
  - b. The obligation that we have to act according to this power (12-13).
3. Romans 8:14-17 continues Paul's discussion of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So let's read what Paul has to say in this passage.

### **Children of God**

Paul's focus in these next few verses is on our being children of God.

1. The first thing that Paul says is that those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God (14).
  - a. What does it mean to be led by the Spirit?
    - i. What it doesn't mean: Christians will sometimes refer to their feeling that they have been led by the Spirit to do such and such. What we mean by that is that we have felt an impression to follow a certain specific course of action and we have assumed that to be an inner prompting of the Holy Spirit. “I had to choose between A and B, and after praying about it, I felt led to choose A.” However, that's not what Paul is talking about.
    - ii. When Paul uses the term “led by the Spirit” in this passage, he is talking about to refer to the controlling influence of the Spirit. We see it used twice of Jesus (Matthew 4:1; Luke 4:1)
      1. Understanding this phrase to be talking about control fits the context. After all, verse 14 explains verse 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, 1992, page 837

For [by way of explanation] all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

2. Now, the concept behind being led by the Spirit is not new. It is similar to what Paul means when he uses these terms:
  - a. 8:4 – “walk . . . according to the Spirit”
  - b. 8:5 – “live according to the Spirit”
  - c. 8:5 – “set their minds on the things of the Spirit” (also v. 6)
  - d. 8:9 – “in the Spirit”
3. All of these expressions are describing control.

- b. But Paul *does* say something he has not said to this point in Romans that opens up a whole new perspective on our relationship with God. He says that those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.
  - i. Let me make a comment about the reference to gender here. In many places in Scripture, it is appropriate to take a gender-specific term and understand it as being gender-inclusive. For example, look at Matthew 16:26. Jesus certainly is not referring only to males. Similarly, the expression “brothers” found so frequently in the NT is appropriately understood as including men and women.
  - ii. But in this particular place, it is a mistake to lose the word “son” here. The preface to the English Standard Version puts it this way, “*the English word “sons” (translating the Greek word huioi) is retained in specific instances because of its meaning as a legal term in the adoption and inheritance laws of first-century Rome.*”<sup>2</sup>
  - iii. The phrase sons of God pertains to every Christian male or female. But as we will see, in this particular context, the use of the term “son” is tied up with its meaning in the culture in which Paul is writing. We’ll look at that next.

2. The second thing Paul says is “you have received the is the Spirit of adoption as sons.” (15)

a. Explaining Adoption

- i. Definition: We’re familiar with what adoption means. When you adopt a child, you take a child who is not a part of your family and make him a part of your family. Similarly, *Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family.*<sup>3</sup>
- ii. Significance:
  1. Here is where we see the deliberate use of the word “son.” In both the Old Testament and New Testament cultures, it was important for a man to have a male who would carry on the family name. In Roman times a man could adopt a boy who would be raised with the expectation of eventually

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<sup>2</sup>*The Holy Bible : English standard version.* 2001. Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>3</sup>Grudem, W. A. (1994). *Systematic theology : An introduction to biblical doctrine* (736). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House.

inheriting everything that rightfully belonged to the father. Single men would in certain cases adopt sons.<sup>4</sup>

2. John MacArthur writes this: *For some people today, the concept of adoption carries the idea of second-class status in the family. In the Roman culture of Paul's day, however, an adopted child, especially an adopted son, sometimes had greater prestige and privilege than the natural children. According to Roman law, a father's rule over his children was absolute. If he was disappointed in his natural sons' skill, character, or any other attribute, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired. If the boy proved himself worthy the father would take the necessary legal steps for adoption. At the death of the father, a favored adopted son would sometimes inherit the father's title, the major part of the estate, and would be the primary progenitor of the family name. Because of its obvious great importance, the process of Roman adoption involved several carefully prescribed legal procedures. The first step totally severed the boy's legal and social relationship to his natural family, and the second step placed him permanently into his new family. In addition to that, all of his previous debts and other obligations were eradicated, as if they had never existed. For the transaction to become legally binding, it also required the presence of seven reputable witnesses, who could testify, if necessary, to any challenge of the adoption after the father's death.*<sup>5</sup>
  - iii. Adoption is why not every person is a child of God (despite the fact that it is common to express the idea that we are all God's children – see Ephesians 2:3). I don't want to press Paul's meaning too far, but adoption is something very special, and it has happened to you if you have trusted in Christ.
- b. What are the implications of adoption? In verses 15-17 Paul tells us three ways in which this idea of being brought into God's family. I don't have time to do anything other than list them this morning, but after the Missions Conference next week, we're going to come back and look at each one in the weeks that follow:
- i. An intimate relationship with God as Father (15)
  - ii. The inner affirmation of the Spirit that we are really God's children (16)
  - iii. Recipients of our Father's inheritance (17).

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<sup>4</sup> See article on Adoption in The New Unger's Bible Dictionary.

<sup>5</sup>MacArthur, J. (1996, c1991, c1994). *Romans* (436). Chicago: Moody Press.

## **Connecting This Passage to Your Life**

If you have trusted in Christ as your Savior, you have been justified (declared free from the penalty of sin and right with God). You have been regenerated (made alive). You are being sanctified (made progressively into Christ's image). And you have been adopted as God's own child. And here is the thing that ought to stand out in our minds: we deserve none of it.

A sermon should always have a clear application. And the Bible does point us to some responses to God's love for us. But let me encourage these:

1. Get to know what being a child of God involves.
2. Respond in your heart to the fact that the holy creator of the universe took us – rebels that we were – and made us his children.