

Knowing That We Really Belong
Romans 8:16
#31 in a Series on Paul's Letter to the Romans
Faith Community Church – June 4, 2006

Objective: *To explain the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and to point to the biblical sources of genuine assurance.*

Introduction – Please turn to Romans 8.

I want to talk with you this morning about the Holy Spirit. We've encountered the ministry of the Holy Spirit throughout chapters 6-8, but I want to take a few moments this morning to talk about the Spirit's work in us generally, and then look at a specific aspect of His ministry to us from Romans 8:16.

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit

1. What Does He Do?

The Holy Spirit is actively involved both in the process of our becoming Christians and in the process of our progressively becoming like Jesus.

- a. It is the Spirit's application of the Word of God to our lives that brings us an understanding of our sinfulness and Christ as our Savior. (John 16:8-11¹; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16).
- b. It is the Spirit who makes us spiritually alive when we repent of our sins and trust in Christ (Romans 8:1-11).
- c. It is the Spirit who places us into Christ, identifying us with Christ and with other believers (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).
- d. It is the Holy Spirit who is given to us as a deposit (down-payment) or guarantee of our future inheritance (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13-14; Romans 8:15).
- e. It is the Holy Spirit who controls us and shapes our minds after the mind of God, which means that we look at life through a biblical lens (Romans 8:1-8; Ephesians 5:15-21 comparing to Colossians 3:16-17).

2. Where is the Holy Spirit? The New Testament clearly teaches that a person who has trusted in Christ is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. See for example John 14:7; Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:22; 2 Timothy 1:4).

¹ The Reformation Study Bible footnote on this verse questions whether it is best applied to the idea of conviction of sin.

The point of this survey is to show that the Holy Spirit is actively at work in each of us as individuals, and collectively as a group of Christians.

The Witness of the Spirit With Our Spirit

1. What form does this assurance take?

Having said that, we want to look at another aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and that is what Paul writes about in Romans 8:16: “The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

What Paul is saying is that the Holy Spirit is at work in those who have been made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, bringing assurance that we really are children of God, that we really are saved.

One of the things that is important when we study the Bible is to ask questions about the meaning of the text. We are often quick to leap to a conclusion without careful consideration. And in this passage, we need to ask the question, what form does this assurance take?

The other week we talked about the idea of being led by the Spirit. I talked about how there are some Christians who feel that they are in an almost continual conversation with God, receiving different urgings and promptings that they rely on to guide them through their day. People sometimes claim that God spoke to them, and by that they usually mean that they sensed God’s direction in an inaudible, but still very real, way. I’ve noticed that over the last decade there has been a lot written about developing this kind of conversational relationship with God. Find a quiet place and just listen to what God has to say.

I will freely admit that I am a bit of a skeptic when it comes to that kind of thing. Part of the reason is that I know people who have been misled by the “voices” and promptings that they have attributed to God. Primarily, though, I am concerned about people seeking God’s voice outside of the place where he has already spoken, which is Scripture.

Having said that, I will freely admit to the fact that our Christian life is in some places experiential. Therefore when Paul says that “the Spirit bears witness to our spirit,” I believe he is talking about something that happens in our inner being. It is, in that sense, an experience.

2. More Than an Inner Voice

But I would have to conclude that it is more than simply an inner impression that is given. I wish Paul had described this in more detail, but he didn’t, so we have to depend on the rest of what we know about the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us understand this more fully. What I have come to believe is that this is more than simply an inner voice that whispers words of assurance to us. I have two reasons for saying this:

- a. We have other “voices” to contend with.
 - i. It is not impossible to consider Satan as the author of doubts about our salvation, though I am not sure I could point to a specific chapter and verse (accuser of the brethren probably does not apply in a subjective sense).
 - ii. John writes about another voice in 1 John 3:19-21. Our own heart calls the reality of our faith into question.
- b. The ministry of the Spirit is so intimately connected to the Scriptures, that I have to conclude that while this witness to our spirit is indeed subjective, it has its foundation in our interaction with the Bible.

If someone came to me regarding the issue of assurance that they were a child of God, I would take them to the Scripture to review the promise of the Gospel, and then to other passages that talk about the basis for our assurance. And in using the Word of God, the Spirit of God works subjectively in our hearts, assuring us that we are children of God.

Why Is this Important?

There are two ways in which this becomes an important issue:

1. The absence of assurance could be an indication that new life does not exist, and that God is graciously calling you to repentance.
2. It is simply not possible to enjoy a relationship with God if we are not convinced that God is in fact our Father. And because God cares about this, the Spirit is at work with us to assure us that we really do belong. Hebrews 10 discusses several implications of the fact that we really do belong to God. Let me leave you with the first one:

Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.