

The work of the Spirit in our lives

Romans 8.12-17

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Today we commemorate the day of Pentecost – the day when God poured out his Spirit on his Church. You do not have to be member of a Pentecostal Church to celebrate this great gift of God.



I have a Pentecostal background, so I appreciate all things that we can say about his power, his gifts, but today I will not focus on this - maybe another time.

The Apostle Paul certainly had a strong theology of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8 we get a glimpse of this; I like to focus today on that passage because it sheds light on important aspects of the work of the Holy Spirit in our church and in our lives.

1. He leads us to obey God

First - how do we know we are children of God? The apostle says, 'All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God'. If we are led by the Spirit, we can be assured that we are God's children.

So, what does this mean, to be led by the Spirit? I think the concept can have different practical meanings.

In the context of the book of Acts, in chapter two and elsewhere, we see that the Holy Spirit can lead people into moments of great joy, love, peace, even ecstasy. I guess you have had these moments, when you feel so close to God.

We also see how the leading of the Spirit can sometimes mean that the Apostles go here, or there, or the Spirit stops them from going somewhere.

Have you never had this strong sense that you had to do something, or say something to someone, and it was exactly spot on, and it really helped that other person?

We also sometimes hear people use this term, 'being led by the Spirit', as a weak excuse for impulsive behavior, for not preparing for sermons, or as an excuse for

bizarre behavior. That, I think, is abusing the term. This is not what the Bible means with being led by the Spirit.

In Romans 8, I think Paul means something different. He says, in verse 13: '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'. So, the Spirit is involved in making us live better lives!

And then Paul continues, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are Sons of God.'

Paul connects the work of the Holy Spirit with helping us live a life for God. It is the Spirit - God in us, the power of God in us, the mind of God in us, who moves us away from sinning to living for Him.

He creates in us the desire to obey our Lord and to live a life for Him.

This does not mean we become perfect overnight; it means that when we sin, there is this voice in us – the voice of the Holy Spirit actually - telling us to change our life and to return to God.

God the Spirit is at work in our life and in our church to move us to commit our lives to God.

This is why the Holy Spirit was given to the Church on the day of Pentecost. So that we are drawn up to God again and again. He leads us to obey God.

The Holy Spirit uses tools to develop our Christian lifestyle – He uses the Word of God – so we have to listen, to read, to ponder.

He also uses other people to sometimes confront us. He uses our circumstances to make us trust God more.

If we realize our sinfulness, our shortcomings, our mistakes, this should not make us despair of his Fatherhood and that we are his children.

The fact that we realize our sins is clear proof that the Holy Spirit is at work – so sensitivity to our shortcomings actually shows that we are a child of the Father.

2. He bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God

The second manner, in which the Holy Spirit ensures us that we are children of God, is by actually testifying to it in our own spirit. "He bears witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."



This inner conviction is, again, rather mystical. It is about God speaking to us. God confirming to you: you are my child.

For doing this, the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God; even now, as you listen, He confirms to your heart: I am Gods child! He uses the Bible – where Jesus says plainly that those who believe in Him, are children of God.

And the Spirit also makes us see the fruit of His work in our lives. He transforms us by his moral guidance. Yes slowly, every so slowly he changes us, but any change testifies to the fact that we are Gods children.

But He also testifies to our hearts in a more direct manner – this is the mystery of a God who communicates with us! He assures you that He adopted you as his son, his daughter. We have become part of his family.

The Roman Empire in the time of the New Testament had some clear laws for adoption. Witnesses played an important role. Seven people had to be witnesses to the legal transaction.

Well, the one Holy Spirit is enough for us. He testifies to us that we are children of God, and the matter is thereby assured.

God our Father adopted us as his children by making us part of the life of His One and Only Son, Jesus Christ.

Our unity by faith with Jesus Christ the Son of God, had made us children of the Father.

And the Holy Spirit of God who is in our life, testifies to this. He tells you: For sure, you are God's child.

3. He makes you pray to God as Father

Paul underlines that we can be certain of being children of God by pointing to a third aspect of the Spirit's work in you.

The Spirit makes us address God as 'Abba, Father', and therefore we can be sure we have been adopted by God as his children.

Now this word Abba is Aramaic. It is the word Jesus himself used when He spoke with God in the garden of Gethsemane. It was also the word Jesus taught his disciples to use when praying to God. 'Our Father who art in heaven.'



When Paul speaks of us calling God, 'Abba Father', he does not just focus on the inner feelings of believers, that God is a Father.

He refers, I think, to the common, the communal prayer life of the early church. He most likely refers to the liturgical habit in the very early churches, where the Lord's Prayer was often prayed.

This common prayer cannot exist without our personal fellowship with God to begin with. Our individual hearts cry to him: God, My Father...

To address God as Father is not something small. It is a sign of our confidence actually, because it presupposes closeness and intimacy, and it suggests that we are not afraid of Him.

Is God then not angry at us? Is He not a dangerous God? Can we really speak with Him, in a manner that is so close?

Many of our Muslim friends here in The Netherlands live in great fear of God.

They cannot trust Him because you can never be sure that Allah accepts you, and you can never be sure of His behavior. He may decide to crush you like a cockroach if you do not follow every rule of his rulebook.

But we can pray to God with confidence; He is our Father. To be able to call God 'Abba, Father' is an amazing thing.

The Holy Spirit drives the children of God to talk with him, to communicate with Him, in a manner that is personal, intimate, and full of confidence. And this in itself shows that we are indeed children of God.

We find all this so 'normal' but it is a miracle. How can human beings communicate with God Almighty!? And do that in a relationship of trust, and love?

Well, we can, because it is God Almighty Himself whose Spirit is in us and among us. God gave His Spirit to his church, to enable us to live for him, to love him, to speak with him. He is like a magnet, given by God inside us, that draws us continually up to God.

All this has been made possible because we have been adopted by God. Slaves you may treat badly – but your own sons and daughters you love and defend with your own life!

Our word adoption comes from Latin, *adoptio*. The Apostle Paul refers mainly to the Roman legal habit of adoption in this letter to the believers in the city of Rome.

In the Roman Empire adoption was a difficult process, but once adopted, a child was legally absolutely similar to the natural children of the father.

By adoption a child received the same legal rights as the other children, not unlike how adoption is treated in the western world nowadays.

In the Roman Empire, the adopted son lost all rights in his previous family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in the new family.

The old life of the adopted son was wiped out. All his debts were cancelled; he was regarded as a new person totally separate from his past life.

In the eyes of the law, he was absolutely the son of his new father. The Roman Empire took this very seriously. Emperor Claudius adopted the adult man Nero as his son, in order for Nero to inherit the throne of the Empire, and this was accepted by the politicians as totally normal.

The adopted child became a legitimate heir of the estates of his new father.

Conclusion

Our adoption as children of God has similar impact; our former life exists no longer; our slate of debts has been wiped clean; we are now truly children of God, and God's inheritance is ours.

Salvation started with the eternal plan of God; it was made possible because God himself came with Christmas to this world for our salvation.

It is finalized because God came with Pentecost to his church to lead us into a life of love and obedience for God, to make us know with great certainty: God is now our Father, and to draw us into relating to God in prayer, as Our Father in heaven.

And this means we can be assured of being heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. As children of God, we will inherit with Jesus Christ all that the Father will give to his Son. What Jesus Christ inherits, we inherit, because we are children of God.

And what we will inherit is above all, communion, eternal communion with God. Of which we already have a foretaste because with Pentecost God himself came into our lives to make us enjoy all these great blessings.

One day we will enjoy the blessed presence of our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forever and ever. And today, thanks to the Holy Spirit who has come to us, we can already enjoy a tremendous foretaste.

We are always drawn back to God by his work in our inner being; He gives us confidence that God is our loving Father; He makes us enjoy that we are truly children of God.

+ Amen