

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

“Let’s not fall into the fallacy of thinking that unless we are big, we are going to be ineffective. One with God is a majority. So often God has done some of the most amazing things in the whole history of the church through remnants.” (Lloyd Jones)

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The Spirit of Adoption as Sons

January 18, 2026

Sermon Text: Romans 8:15

Scripture Reading: Romans 5:1-11

The 8th chapter of Paul’s Epistle to the Romans is not only a central and vital passage concerning the Christian’s assurance, but just as importantly it concerns the Christian’s understanding of his or her new relationship to God as Father. Paul tells us that a radical change has taken place when we were born again by the

regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, this change concerns the great transition from the Old Covenant to the New. You see this in our text for this morning:

Rom 8:15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

We do not relate to God in Christ as the Old Covenant people did. Paul says that under the Law given at Sinai, the people were under a “spirit of slavery leading to fear.” You saw this right from the start:

Exo 19:16-18 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. (17) And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (18) Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

This was not only true of the Israelites in Moses' day, it is true of every person who is outside of Christ. The sinner's relationship to God is defined by the Law. And we know that the Law will only bring condemnation and curse.

We look around at the unsaved and largely we see that they appear to be very content and happy. Careless about their souls, assuming all is well. And yet notice how they dislike thinking or talking

about God when He is truthfully presented to them. Speak to the sinner about the holiness and justice of God who is a consuming fire and their hatred of the subject betrays their fear. The Law of Sinai still terrifies.

We also know that the very purpose of the Law is to incite sin, to prove to man that he is justly condemned and that in himself he can never meet the Law's demands. That he must flee to Christ if he is to be saved.

If you are a Christian, if you are truly born again, it is because at one time you knew this spirit of bondage leading to fear that the Law brings, and the Lord drove you to Christ.

Did you watch the short video of Scott Adams, the creator of the Dilbert cartoon who recently died? He announced that he was going to "convert" to Christianity. Not just now, he said, but soon, before he dies. But there was absolutely no evidence in him that he was under the spirit of bondage leading to

fear. No mention of sin. HE would do it and in his own time.

Listen to Lloyd Jones on this:

“We are aware that we have an antagonist, an adversary, who often persuades people that they have the Spirit of adoption when that is not true of them. The devil is always ready to make us feel secure and happy if thereby he can lull us into a kind of carnal peace., which will mean that we are no longer troubled about our salvation. It is important therefore, as the New Testament frequently exhorts us, to ‘test’ and to ‘prove the spirits,’ because every spirit is not of God.

And the devil sometimes persuades people that they are saved people, Christians, and sons of God. It is important therefore that we should be able to differentiate between the true Spirit of adoption given by the Holy Spirit, and the counterfeit of the devil.

It is just here that this ‘spirit of bondage and of fear’ becomes invaluable as a test. If we have

never known the spirit of bondage and of fear, we had better examine very carefully what may appear at first sight to be the Spirit of adoption. I lay down this proposition, *that the spirit of bondage and fear always precedes the Spirit of adoption.*

John Preston, one of the Puritans, states the matter in this way – ‘If you never had the spirit of bondage, certainly you have not yet received the Spirit of the Son’ for the Apostle speaks of it here as the common condition to all Christians, they do not receive the spirit of bondage *again*; you had it once, but now you have the Spirit of adoption. I say, every man must have this spirit of bondage, and the ground of it is this, because no man can come to Christ except the Law be a schoolmaster to bring him to Christ.’

Then he says, ‘And there is very great reason for it, because otherwise we should never know the love of Christ. He that has not known what the spirit of bondage is, what these fears are, what the terrors of conscience are in some

measure, knows not what Christ has suffered for him, or what deliverance he has had by Him.’

His argument is this – Why does any man ever go to Christ? Why does he ever apply to Christ? What reason has he for doing so except this one reason, that he has known this spirit of bondage, this fear, this unhappiness?” [Romans, The Sons of God, chapter 17]

See it? *You have not received the spirit of bondage leading to fear AGAIN...*

Paul is speaking to all Christians. If you are truly born again, then you have received the Spirit of adoption, not the spirit of bondage leading to fear AGAIN. Which means, at one time you did in fact have this spirit of bondage leading to fear.

And that was (and is) the very purpose of the Law. To make the sinner tremble as at Sinai. To condemn. To show the sinner his sin.

“The spirit of bondage – all who are not dead to the Law (ie, the unregenerate) and know of no way to escape Divine wrath but by obeying it, are necessarily under the spirit of bondage and fear, serving in the oldness of the letter and not in newness of Spirit. For so far from fulfilling the demands of the Law, they fail in satisfying themselves. A spirit of bondage then, must belong to all who are not acquainted with God’s method of salvation [in Christ].” [Robert Haldane]

NOTE: As we describe this spirit of bondage, let’s not make the mistake of equating the exact experience of every Christian before being born again. EVERY Christian knows SOMETHING of this spirit of bondage and fear, but not everyone has experienced it in the same degree. Some, like John Bunyan or Charles Spurgeon came under an intense and prolonged burden of it. Others however have not tasted it to the degree they did, BUT all have experienced it.

“The spirit of bondage is the effect of the Law, which, manifesting his

sinfulness to man, and the fearful wrath of God, makes him tremble under the apprehension of its curse.

The Spirit of Adoption

But...in Christ the Spirit of God does not bring us under this sense of condemnation and fear. Rather, He comes as the Spirit of *adoption*. Listen to Paul explain it to the Galatians:

Gal 4:1-7 Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, (2) but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. (3) So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. (4) But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, (5) so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (6) Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our

hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (7) Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Rom 7:5-6 For while we were in the flesh, the sinful passions, which were aroused by the Law, were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death. (6) But now we have been released from the Law, having died to that by which we were bound, **so that we serve in newness of the Spirit and not in oldness of the letter.**

You see this great change again in Galatians:

Gal 4:21-31 Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? (22) For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. (23) But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise.

(24) This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two

covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. (25) Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. (26) But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. (27) For it is written, "REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR; BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR; FOR MORE NUMEROUS ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND."

(28) And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. (29) But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. (30) But what does the Scripture say? "CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON, FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN." (31) So then, brethren, we are not children

of a bondwoman, but of the free woman.

Now, do not make the mistake of thinking that this only has application to the Israelites in the Old Testament era. No, *Paul is writing to Christians in Galatia and thus to us, in the New Covenant time.* And he is telling them of this HUGE change which has taken place in Christ and thus they must not listen to anyone who is telling them that they still relate to God in terms of that old era.

John speaks of this very same change:

1Jn 4:16-18 We have come to know and **have believed the love which God has for us.** God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (17) By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. (18) **There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves**

punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.

It is the intent and purpose of God in Christ that believers in Him might serve Him without fear.

Luk 1:67-74 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying: (68) "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, (69) And has raised up a horn of salvation for us In the house of David His servant— (70) As He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old— (71) Salvation FROM OUR ENEMIES, And FROM THE HAND OF ALL WHO HATE US; (72) To show mercy toward our fathers, And to remember His holy covenant, (73) The oath which He swore to Abraham our father, (74) **To grant us that we, being rescued from the hand of our enemies, Might serve Him without fear,**

“But you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

Now, I will do my best to show you this great truth, but ultimately the way that you will truly know it is by the Holy Spirit who dwells within you:

Rom 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,

Eph 1:13-14 In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, (14) who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

1Jn 4:13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

“Contrary to the spirit of bondage, the Spirit of adoption produces in the heart a sense of reconciliation with God, love to Him, a regard to holiness, hatred of sin, and peace

of conscience through the knowledge of the love of God in Jesus Christ.” [Haldane]

Rom 5:5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

NOTE: We live in a wicked, fallen world surrounded by those walking in darkness and who are enemies of Christ. Many times these people are even our own family members or even professing Christians who are counterfeit. These kinds of people work hard to convince us of the lie that we are no different than they are, OR they try to tell us that we are inferior to them and surely that we therefore do not measure up to God’s standard. How many children have grown up in homes under such people as parents who, in their own sin, worked hard to tell their children how surely they must displease the Lord.

All such efforts are from the enemy, because if you are born

again, you are no longer under condemnation, you are not related to God by the Old Covenant and that spirit of bondage leading to fear.

Yes, examine yourself to see if you are in the faith. That you are truly a son and heir of God in Christ. But if you pass the test, never go back to Sinai’s threatenings.

The Marvelous Nature of this Adoption

When we consider adoption in human terms, what generally happens? Potential parents search for a child who will be compatible – they look for qualities in the child – age, background, even nationality, and so on.

“In choosing a son by adoption, the adopting party has regard to certain real or supposed qualities which appear meritorious or agreeable.”
[Haldane]

But God....when adopting His people, calling them out of darkness into light, *produces*

Himself the qualities in those whom He chooses.

indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

“This adoption, then, is accompanied with a *REAL* change, and so great a change, that it bears the name of that which is the real ground of sonship and is called regeneration.” [Haldane]

Do you see it? The thing is fantastic! The Christian bears God’s name because he is a real child of the Father. He is joined to Christ.

And now we are ready to look into this subject of *the Spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’*

Give serious and prolonged thought to this truth, and be *thankful*. God, in Christ, effects in us the new birth, making us new creations, and He *assigns His name to us because we are actually born of Him. We bear, you might say, His DNA.*

“The Father gives His children a supernatural life by His Spirit sent into their hearts; and the Spirit by that regeneration which He accomplishes, affirms to them the adoption which is in Christ Jesus; and in the resulting persuasion within them, they are enabled to cry out to God as their Father.” [Haldane’]

Rom 8:14-17 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (15) For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" (16) The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, (17) and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if

This is why John says:

1Jn 3:1 See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the

world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

1Jn 4:16 We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Many people who are Christians, perhaps even many of you – never experienced genuine love from their earthly father. This can be a continuing hindrance to such a person in relating to God in the New Covenant, in Christ. An unloving earthly father tends to keep a person back at Sinai, regarding God as that thundering, terrible voice whose demands were and are impossible to fulfill.

But if you are born again, the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of adoption – is in you, witnessing to you directly and through Scripture that you have been born into the Father's own family and that He loves you. You can accept this assurance. And you can examine yourself to see your heavenly Father's own qualities being formed increasingly

in you so that more and more you bear the Father's image:

“By this new birth we obtain characteristics and qualities which correspond to the very nature of God our Father. He enlightens our understanding, sanctifies our will, purifies our affections (so that more and more we love the things He loves). His likeness becomes increasingly evident in us.”
[Haldane]

Let me illustrate as I am sure you could as well. I recall that one time years ago I met a man who knew my father. He introduced himself to me and then he said, “well, I can really see that you are your father's son.” He meant that he could see my dad's physical resemblance in me. I looked like my dad in ways that could be seen.

How many times have you said in a similar way, “she looks like her mother.” Or you can even hear the resemblance in a person's speech if you knew their parents.

In earthly adoption this is not true – at least certainly in physical qualities. An adopted child does not “look like” his or her parent. But as we have already noted, God’s adoption of His people, in Christ, is an actual birth. We are His children by birth. He has begotten us. And therefore we resemble Him more and more as He works out His sanctification of us. We are *the new man whom Paul spoke of* (Ephesians 4:23-24). Peter tells us that we are *partakers of the divine nature* (2 Peter 1:4).

In contrast, man in his sin is a child of Satan and bears the image of this wicked father. “You are of your father the devil” Jesus told the Jews-

Joh 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

And this is also why the Lord Jesus (John 13) and the Apostle John in particular, emphasized that the person who is born of God loves the brethren – the family of God. John is very emphatic on this:

1Jn 3:10-16 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (11) For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; (12) not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. (13) Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. (14) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (15) Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) We know love by this, that He laid down His

life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.

I hope then that you can all understand why I wanted to preach on this text this morning – Romans 8:15-17) and to do the best I can to help you see and know the Father's love for His children as we have it so clearly stated here by the Apostle Paul.

Do you know Him? Does He know you? Do you know any of this matter of the Spirit of adoption pouring forth the love of God in and to you? Or are you still back at Mt. Sinai, identified with Hagar the slave rather than with Sarah and Isaac, the son of promise?

1Jn 4:18-21 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. (19) We love, because He first loved us. (20) If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (21)