

20. The adopted sons of God

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Nowadays it is so easy to purchase things we like. While the majority of people rush to malls in Tucson to buy their Christmas presents for their loved ones, I get on internet and buy them with my credit cards. Then they deliver them to my door step. No hassles of looking for a parking space and carrying shopping bags... I am sure that I am not the only one who uses credit cards.

Nothing wrong with using credit cards as long as you pay them back within one month cycle so that you don't have to pay those high interests. But the majority of American credit card users are heavily in debts. In one of the news articles, one third of those who have more than \$10,000 in credit card debt have a household income of less than \$50,000. The credit card debt in the USA is 880 billion dollars. The number of bankruptcies is still extremely high with about 1.5 million personal filings a year. Do you know that the number one reason for divorce is not infidelity, rather financial stress?

It might be fun to buy what you want now, but the day comes and you have to pay them back. A major bummer, huh?

Proverbs 22:7 The rich rules over the poor, And the borrower is servant to the lender.

But not all debt is bad. A good example is debts of gratitude. If someone pulls you out of a raging fire and saves you from burning, you'll feel indebted to that person. You will probably want to do nice things for him. Not because you have to, but because you want to. It's natural and it makes sense. It flows from your heart.

That kind of indebtedness is what we Christians have for the Lord Jesus for His sacrifice on the Cross. Because He took all of our sins onto Himself and became the ultimate sacrifice for us so that we get to have eternal life in heaven. We are freed from the tyranny of the flesh and set free from the bondage of satan and sin. Now living in the Holy Spirit, we want to please God and show our gratitude to Him, not as a part of our payments, as if we could pay Him back. And we can not.

This morning the Lord is going to teach us about being the adopted children of God through apostle Paul from chapter 8 of the Book of Romans.

A. NOT ACCORDING TO THE FLESH

Romans 8:12-13 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors--not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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.

Apostle Paul has made it abundantly clear to all of us from this Book, Romans that salvation is a gift from God and that we can not do anything to earn new life. Before we become born-again, we were dead in our sin, separated from God, and under His wrath. We were completely unable to earn His acceptance.

With all the riches of the world, people might be able to buy a bed but not a good night's sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite, a house but not a home; medicine but not health; pleasure but not peace; amusement but not joy; a crucifix but not a Savior; a church building but not heaven. True joy and happiness cannot

be bought. Good proofs are Paris Hilton and Britney Spears. They have money coming out of their ears, yet they are miserable. Because they live according to their flesh and they don't have Jesus in their hearts.

Living in the flesh is like living on credit cards with a huge balance compounded by extremely high interest rates. It keeps us in slavery and gives us nothing good. Thank God, we are set free by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross that we no longer have obligation to satan and our flesh. Our debt is to the Lord. It is one of those debts we want to do from our hearts.

Whenever we try to put to death the deeds of the flesh by forcing our sinful desires to submit to the Holy Spirit who lives in us, we must do it by the power of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, we will become hypocrites and spiritually proud.

It is not enough for us to have the Spirit. The Spirit of God must have us. Only then can He share with us the abundant, victorious life that can be ours in Christ.

Last week we learned that we were created for the will of God. Rather than living for the purpose of God, over 50% of born-again Christians said that the purpose of their living is personal fulfillment and satisfaction according to the most recent survey done by the Barna Group. That is down right scary and sad.

It is no wonder why so many Christians are living defeated lives. They forgot why they are on this earth. Some of you might be the ones I just described. You are more concerned about what you can get from this world – whether it is wealth or fame, power, selfish satisfaction, you fill the blanks – than fulfilling what you are supposed to do as a child of God. It is time to wake up.

Do you want to have joy in your heart that will not go away? I will give you a secret formula to have true joy. It spells JOY.

'J' stands for "Jesus first",

'O' stands for "Others second",

'Y' stands for "Yourself last".

If you use this method that is shown by Jesus and directed the Holy Spirit, your life will be filled with true joy.

B. BECOMING THE CHILDREN OF GOD

Romans 8:14-15 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 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."

To understand the magnitude of this adoption concept – becoming the children of the Living God by adoption, we must look into the first century Roman custom which the original readers of this epistle were familiar with.

In the Roman world of the first century AD, an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate. He was not inferior in status to a son naturally born in the father's family.

Under Roman adoption, the life and standing of the adopted child changed completely. The adopted son lost all rights in his old family and gained all new rights in his new family. The old life of the adopted son was completely wiped out, with all debts being canceled, with nothing from his past counting against him any more.

Just like that, once we become children of our God, He doesn't remember our sinful past anymore, because it is wiped clean by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are no longer enemies of God, but we are children of God. Can you dig that? Doesn't the grace and love of our God just blow your mind?

I want you to understand a couple of important things as the children of God:

1) Our Divine Empowerment

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

This, perhaps, is the clearest of all the biblical statements regarding God's role in our sanctification. Not only did God rescue us from the penalty of sin, but He continually rescues us from the power of sin. And when He glorifies us, He'll remove us from the presence of sin. Until then, He promises to promote our daily development in righteousness until Jesus returns. He does this by empowering us through the Holy Spirit.

2) Our Divine Destiny

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Paul leaves no room here for us to think that sanctification is ultimately up to us. As a bride waiting for her groom, the church must be prepared for its destiny – its wedding to Christ. Upon His arrival, we must be pure and holy – “without blame.”

Given humanity's track record, do you think it would be wise of God to leave that task up to us? Obviously not. So, He has taken it upon Himself to handle our sanctification. Just as we could not achieve our own justification, so we cannot obtain our own sanctification or glorification.

The Greek word for 'led' in v14 is 'ago'. It means “to lead by laying hold of, and this way to bring to the point of destination.” This term identifies the way the Holy Spirit takes hold of us and guides us in our Christian journey. His leading in and of itself reassures us that we are the very sons of God.

About three years ago, I was at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, Israel, doing what the typical tourists would do – taking photos endlessly, looking around with an open mouth and saying, “Uh,” and “Ah!” I could understand a very small amount of Hebrew words. As a little Jewish boy was running after his daddy and hollered at him, “Abba!”, I clearly understood it.

Little Jewish boys and girls addressed their fathers as 'Abba' – the equivalent of our word 'Daddy'. This word implies a close, loving relationship in which the child feels totally comfortable in the presence of his or her father. How many of us love and trust God so totally that we would rest in His arms like a toddler? As believers, we can! God, in His great mercy, has allowed us, not only to stand before Him, but even to sit on His lap.

C. THE JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 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.

Notice v16, Paul switches from using the word 'sons' to using the word 'children'. The Holy Spirit's indwelling presence attests the believer's birth relationship to God. So we have not only been chosen and brought into a whole new family through adoption, but we have been born anew into God's family – new creations in Christ. And the Spirit of God delights to witness to this truth.

When we hear the words 'joint heirs with Christ', some of you might wonder, "Is God the Father planning to die?" No, He won't die. But it is a matter of status. Being a child of God also means having an inheritance from Him. In Luke 18:18 the rich young ruler asked Jesus, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" But the rich young ruler missed the point because inheritance is not a matter of doing, it is a matter of being – of being in the right family.

But satan wants to plague us – especially new converts – by causing us to doubt our membership in God's family. When we continually struggle against the flesh, we can easily interpret this as a sign that our faith "didn't make it." But v16 gives us the Spirit's own assurance, because the Holy Spirit does not base His assuring testimony on progress or the lack of it in the Christian life. He does not lead us to cry, "I am God's child." Rather, He leads us to call upon God as Father.

The second half of v17 would not be the most received verse for an obvious reason. None of us wants to suffer. If you do, please let me know, I will stay far away from you. My wife Karen can tell you that I don't care to have sufferings or pains.

But sharing sufferings with Jesus is a completely different story.

Philippians 3:10-11 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, 11 if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

In fact, our sharing in present suffering is a condition of our future glorification. As far as God is concerned, it is all part of the same package of sonship, no matter how our flesh may want to have the inheritance and the glory without the suffering.

D. THE REMINDER

There is no need for believers to be defeated. We can yield our bodies to the Spirit and by faith overcome the old nature. The Spirit of life will empower us. The Spirit of death will enable us to overcome the flesh. And the Spirit of adoption will enrich us and lead us into the will of God. After all, when we become born-again believers, we are children of God. Remember that.