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Sermon Title: The Spirit of Sonship

Bible Reference: Romans 8:15

**A disclaimer from Pastor Stuart**

*My role in the church here is to feed and care for God’s people the best I can. Key to that, in my opinion is teaching and preaching from the Bible; but that is not all a pastor has to do! In fact after the emails, staff admin, hospital visits, community visits, leadership meetings, etc, etc, there sometimes seems to be little time for sermon prep! Years ago I used to agonise over trying to come up with two, often three, totally original sermons each week. But I’ve found that, for me at least, that is impossibility. I’ve learned to be grateful for and to use the gifts God gives to help me – not only the Holy Spirit, but other Bible teachers and preachers.*

*Over the years I’ve discovered that if something teaches, inspires and excites me it’s likely to do the same for those I speak to. So I admit that sometimes I find myself depending heavily on other people’s ideas, at least to ‘prime the pump’ and therefore I claim originality for very little in these sermons. If you look hard enough and wide enough you’ll probably find who I’ve been reading and learning from! I never knowingly plagiarise, but if you find I have, then I apologise. It must have been that what was said was just too good not to use!*

*I am particularly indebted to the likes of John Piper, Sam Storms, Wayne Grudem, John Ortberg & Rick Warren. The Lord regularly uses them to get my spiritual pulse racing. I’m also indebted to many who kindly make their sermons available on the likes of sermoncentral.com and preachingtoday.com. Others who help me include ‘The Doctor’ (Martyn Lloyd-Jones), C.H Spurgeon and any of the Puritans.*

*These sermons are not made available because I think they’re good but in the hope and with the prayer that they may be used by the Holy Spirit to bless others as they have blessed our own church here in Ipswich, UK.*

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**Assurance: #2 - The Spirit of sonship**

Last time I introduced you to three legs on our assurance stool - a) Promises, b) obedience, c) Led by Spirit. First two can be checked against what we do. 3rd moves into the area of the influence of the Spirit in our lives and the way we can see him changing our thinking, outlook, priorities.

Our text tonight in Romans 8 takes us deeper still and moves almost completely from what can be tested and observed to a work of the Spirit that is subjective and felt. ‘You received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father”.’ **Romans 8:15**. Here Paul calls the H/S the ‘Spirit of Sonship’ by which he means that He is the Spirit that makes us know that we are the children of God, adopted into his family – knowledge not gained by checking if we believe something or do something, but knowledge that comes from knowing something inside, feeling something, sensing something – and it’s a knowing and certainty and a feeling that causes us to talk to God in the most personal, intimate way– ‘*And by him we cry ‘Abba’, ‘Father’’.* This ‘*Abba’* was the Aramaic word that a baby first used of its father; it’s intimate, personal, trusting – much the same as our ‘papa’ or ‘dad’. There’s an innocence, an absence of fear, but still retaining respect of the one spoken to. But it’s expression of closest and most precious relationship. It conveys a sense that the one speaking has a deep and personal connection with the person spoken to.

What we have here in this expression then is something that God by his Spirit works in us at the level of our feelings and emotions. It cannot be deduced by tests, it is deeper than the intellect. It’s not something that a person can persuade themselves of; if you have it you know it! *It is very similar to being in love! You don’t test love with a check list! It is something that you know instinctively.* Such is this precious work/ministry of the H/S.

As such it’s something that some people are wary off – because of personality, because of bad experience or because of what they’ve grown up understanding. But we needn't shy away from it, simply because it’s here in the Bible and it’s another of those good blessings God wants to give us. Real Xianity is not just about believing and acting in a certain way; real Xianity is about a relationship with God through Christ, it’s about us being forgiven from sins and adopted into God’s family and it’s about feeling and experiencing the joy and peace and comfort of that. Real, Biblical Xianity is not just about believing – it’s your *privilege* as Gods child to *experience* and feel as well. Joy that is unspeakable; peace that passes understanding, hope that invigorates.

And much of that comes through the work of the Spirit we’re looking at tonight and next week.

**I think we need to pray!**

Look at what God says through Paul here: *‘You have received the Spirit of sonship’* [NIV]. Some other translations say *‘Spirit of Adoption’*. Translate the phrase how you like he’s telling you in this expression that when he saved you God adopted you into his family and took you in to treat you and love you and care for you and to keep you and provide for you *as one of his own child*.

There would have been many orphans in those days – living on scraps and peoples pity; often homeless, lonely, loveless and hopeless. Every orphans dream was to be adopted, taken in by someone, taken in and loved and cared for.

It is true that when a person adopted a child it put obligations on them – but think for a moment what it meant to the child! Adoption was a legal thing that obligated the new parent to provide and care and protect the child; the child became a full member of the family, not just a slave boy, not just a house keeper or doorman. None of the upstairs downstairs of Downton Abbey; none of the Mr Carson not daring to sit on the settee, etc! An adopted child became part of the family, was treated as part of the family, loved as part of the family and crucially for the child, **felt part of the family!** It was a huge deal.

**And this is what we're talking about here, this is what God has done for you and me**! **Ephesians 1:5** says *‘He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ*’. This was God’s intention in his original choosing and calling.

* *But just notice predestined in this phrase! Off topic, but so precious. We were lost, rebels, enemies, but he chose us! And his closing is what lies behind everything else. You are what you are simply and only because God chose you in the first place! Not because you asked for it, or were worthy or more needy. GLORY!*

And his intention and plan was to call you and to adopt you into his family, *for you to become his child*; for you to be forgiven, for you to be lifted from the rubbish heap of your life. And that is what your life was! Easy to see that for some people, but do us 'good' sinners realise and appreciate that enough? *We were in a pit, we were God’s enemies; our good deeds were nothing more than filthy rags in his sight! We may have had good homes, been decent children, had jobs, success, money, reputation, respect, houses – but all those things are nothing when it comes to eternity!* *They mean nothing to God, they just don’t impress him.* While you were lost and a rebel God called you! Didn’t wait for you to call to him, didn’t wait for you to get cleaned up and presentable, to clean up your act or start behaving well! *Whilst we were still dead in trespasses and sins Christ died for us!*

Yes he chose and called and has now, not withstanding all that, adopted you – fully, completely as one of his children, alongside Jesus himself! **Nothing can change that**, it’s a legal thing he’s done. He won’t/can’t change it.

As a child you are precious to God, the apple of his eye, and he includes you in his inheritance - for you to share and enjoy and own all that is his for all eternity. God says in **Rom 8:17** says ‘*and if we are children we are heirs – heirs of God, co-heirs with Christ'!* Jesus, your brother by adoption is enjoying the first part of that now, but when he returns the new heavens and earth with be 'installed' and you'll share all the glory and wonder and splendour of those with him in that for all eternity. Oh boy – just think about that for a moment! You get to share all that is God’s; not simply as a subject or servant in heaven. To be honest, I’d settle for that wouldn’t you! But it’s better than that! You’ll be there as the Kings child, you’ll be part of the management; the angels will be there to serve you, not you them!

**Christian – this is what you are tonight,** and in this passage the Lord is talking about the work particular work of the Holy Spirit in which he takes these facts from our head to our hearts, and in doing so gives us total assurance of Gods forgiveness and acceptance to such an extent that we cannot help but respond with this cry out to God in child to father gratitude, worship, wonder, love, admiration and trust. Cry is an interesting word - lit means to call out loudly, to scream!

Do you ever feel like that? Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever been certain in this way of Gods love and forgiveness? I suspect most of us feel a sigh in our hearts that carries with it ‘*Oh I wish I felt more like that*!’ ‘*I wish I felt like I really love God more often’. I believe and I trust and I try my best to serve, but this feeling side? I know/experience little of it!* I think that it’s the lack of this that leads to dry and dull and lifeless walk with the Lord, where it’s a duty rather than a delight.

**So let me finish by telling you how you might experience this, because it’s important to realise that this sense of loving God is meant to be normal!** Paul writes here as though they *all* knew it. It’s not just for super spiritual or mature or people with a certain personality or character type! We really aren’t at liberty to say this is for a certain type of person – no, according to Paul this is normal – so it’s for you! If you don’t know it then let me suggest maybe two possible causes (probably more,but these 2 are common)

1. **Lack of appreciation of what God has done for us.**  Lack of understanding just how dire our situation - as per previous in sermon; lack of real conviction of sin then. Humans have a way of thinking too highly of themselves – of minimising their faults and maximising their virtues! Get a true view of sin and it will help breed a healthy sense of appreciation for God. How can we leave him out, neglect him, begrudge him time, effort attention; how can we carry on sinning if we once get a sense of what he’s done for us?

So what can you do? Ask for God to reveal your sin! Pray for a hatred of sin; humble yourself, stop making excuses, stop justifying your sin, see yourself for what you are. Start to look at Jesus and his beauty! It’s counter intuitive to be humbled – but the humble are exactly those the Lord will lift up. (That’s a promise)

1. **Lack of expectation caused by ignorance.** What you don’t know you don’t miss! And many believers are like those in Ephesus – ‘*We haven’t even heard of the H/S’*. Just never realised there was more to Christian life that believing, trusting and walking humbly and dutifully with the Lord. Somehow talk of ‘*joy unspeakable*’ and ‘peace beyond understanding’ and the joy of the Psalms is lost on them, as if they are not really for *all* people! They are and they are for you and they come as the Lord gives you this sense of adoption.

**What’s to be done?**

1. Get and keep yourself in an attitude of heart and mind where God can speak *to* and work *in* you; That includes getting rid of all the sin you possibly can! Read his word, listen to his word; get alone with him and talk to him. Not just about your aches and pains and practical tings, but about him and you and your relationship with him and how you’d like it to be.
2. Obviously do all this be open hearted with a humble attitude and be ready to respond to what he says. Don’t sit in judgement as to whether you agree – if he says something, do it, believe it, trust it.
3. Then wait! He will not deny such a good gift to someone who genuinely seeks. Keep seeking, keep humble, keep talking to him.

Prayer: