

Focus on the Family of God

Russell Moore who teaches at Southern Baptist Seminary told the story of the first time he ever saw the two boys, he and his wife would eventually adopt. The boys were lying in excrement and vomit, covered in heat blisters and flies, in an orphanage somewhere in a little mining community in Russia. Russell and his Maria had applied to adopt and had gone on the first of two trips, not knowing if they would find anyone waiting for them. Immediately upon landing in the former Soviet Union, Moore wondered if he and his wife had made the worst mistake of their lives.

Sitting in a foreign airport, with the smell of European perfume, human sweat, and cigarette smoke wafting all around them, Maria and Russell recommitted to God that they would trust him and that they would adopt whomever he directed them to, regardless of what medical or emotional problems they may have. A Russian judge told them she had two “gray-eyed” boys picked out for them, both of whom had been abandoned by their mothers to a hospital in the little village about an hour from where they were staying.

Sure enough, the orphanage authorities, through their translators, cataloged a terrifying list of medical problems, including fetal alcohol syndrome for one, if not both, of the boys. They looked at each other, as if to say, “This is what the Lord has for us, so here we go.”

The nurse led them up some stairs, down a dark hallway, and into a tiny room with two beds. Russell said he can still see the younger of the two, now Timothy, rocking up and down against the bars of his crib, grinning widely. The older, now Benjamin, was more reserved, stroking my five o’clock shadow with his hand and seeing (he came to realize) a man most probably for the very first time in his life.

Both the boys had hair matted down on their heads, and one of them had crossed eyes. Both of them moved slowly and rigidly, almost like stop-motion clay animated characters from the Christmas television specials of our 1970s childhoods. And Russell and his wife loved them both, at an intuitive and almost primal level, from the very first second. As they left the Russian orphanage, for the first time the boys saw the light of day, cars, and heard the noises of out of doors. As they drove away the boys turned and reached back for their orphanage (*Adopted for Life*). They did not realize what they had just been rescued from and the much better life they were about to learn and enjoy.

God’s Word teaches that each of us as believers has been adopted into the family of God. Because we were born in sin we were spiritual orphans. In Romans 8:14-17 Paul teaches us about our adoption into the family of God.

In Romans 8, Paul is writing about why believers are secure in Christ.

1. We have been delivered from the Law (8:1-4) that we might walk in the Spirit
2. We possess the Holy Spirit (8:5-13) who can help us mortify the deeds of the flesh
3. We are in The Family of God (8:14-17) as mature adults

Adoption in the Bible, however, is different from adoption in our American system. The adoption that Paul refers to is Roman adoption of the first century. It was not one family getting a small child abandoned by another family. Roman adoption was a father adopting his own older son. The adoption ceremony was an induction into adulthood with all the rights and responsibilities of manhood.

The Holy Spirit is also “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom. 8:14–17). The word *adoption* in the New Testament means “being placed as an adult son.” We come into God’s family by birth. But the instant we are born into the family, God adopts us and gives us the position of an adult son. A baby cannot walk, speak, make decisions, or draw on the family wealth. But the believer can do all of these the instant he is born again.[\[4\]](#)

So what are the Marks of Spiritual Adulthood?

1. Obedience to the Word (8:14)

“Sons” or adult sons or spiritually mature believers follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. The same picture is in Galatians 4:1-7.

Just as sheep follow their shepherd, so do mature believers follow the Holy Spirit. The Spirit uses God’s Word to guide or lead us. Jesus predicted this now present ministry of the Holy Spirit in John 16:13.

The Holy Spirit guides us into truth by putting people in our lives to guide us with His Word. He puts parents in the lives of their children (Ephesians 6:1-3). He puts friends in our lives who exhort us with God’s Word (Hebrews 3:12-13). The Holy Spirit puts teachers and pastors in our lives to instruct us in God’s Word (Hebrews 13:17).

Immature believers just wont listen. Mature believers will. Not only is obedience to the Word a mark of spiritual adulthood but also holiness of life.

2. Holiness of Life (8:15a)

The Holy Spirit makes us free from addictions or “bondage” or slavery. Sin is no longer our slave master. Listen again to Paul in 8:2. If your addiction is porn, prescription drugs, drinking, overeating, or over working, the Holy Spirit can break you loose from these shackles.

The Holy Spirit also makes us free from “fear.” The fear of getting caught or the fear of punishment. Paul in 2 Timothy 1:7 encouraged us, “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and soundness of mind.”

C. The Corinthians were the opposite of the adult believer Paul is describing here. In Corinthians 3:1-3, Paul called them spiritual babies. At one of John MacArthur's pastor's conferences a pastor who preached on spiritual infancy from 1 Corinthians 3:1-3, walked out on the platform wearing only an adult pamper, with a baby bottle in one hand, a pacifier around his neck and a Bible in his other hand. What an unnatural sight. But no more unbecoming for a grown up believer who is still immature.

Spiritual babies are addicted to sin (1 Corinthians 6:12). Mature believers are free at last to intimately fellowship with our Father.

3. Intimate Fellowship (8:15b)

God is no longer our angry judge. Before salvation, we were God's enemies (8:7). But God justified us and declared us not guilty. God is no longer our angry judge but because of adoption God is our loving heavenly Father to whom we can go with child like dependence and cry, "Abba, Father." "Abba" was Aramaic or Paul's language as a child. It was the name he spoke when he was a child in calling out to his earthly father. Now it was the name Paul used to call out to God in dependence and intimacy.

I can still remember with fondness when our boys were small, and I would come home after being gone for several hours. They would run through the house to meet me at the door, shouting "Daddy" and throw their arms around me. I now wish I had recorded that scene.

John wrote much about believers being the children of God as in 3:1. And also in 4:18, "There is no (immature) fear in love; but perfect or mature love casts out (immature) fear: because (immature) fear has torment. He that fears is not perfect or mature in love."

When I was young I feared disobeying my Dad. He only wipped me 3 times but they left a lasting impression. My first wipping was for jumping on my neighbor's bed and breaking the slates underneath. The second was for shooting out all the windows in an old abandoned house in the woods with my new BB gun that I had gotten for Christmas. The lasting wipping was for egging cars.

But now that I am grown, I do not fear a wipping. I do fear displeasing him because of our relationship. Mature believers do not fear physical chastisement from God but a loss of closeness. Next, Paul gives us a resulting mark of spiritual adulthood: Assurance of salvation.

4. Assurance of Salvation (8:16)

Paul only mentions two sources of witnesses in our lives (bearing witness is used only three times and only by Paul in Romans).

A. Our conscience bears witness in Romans 2:15 and 9:1-3.

The body is like the computer hard drive and the conscience is like the software. The conscience tells the body what to do and not to do by either accusing or excusing.

If we do wrong according to our conscience, it bears a witness by inflicting guilt. If we do what is right according to our conscience, it bears witness by excusing or remaining silent. This was Paul's experience in 9:1-3 because his conscience was conditioned by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. Conscience bears witness to what is there or not there. So is it with the Holy Spirit.

B. The Holy Spirit also bears witness in Romans 8:16 in relation to our salvation.

If there is obedience to the Word of God, the Holy Spirit bears witness. If there is a lack of obedience to the Word that is presented by a parent, friend, teacher or pastor, the Holy Spirit will not bear witness. The same is true if there is holiness of life and an intimate fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit bears witness. Finally, there is the mark of suffering in the all grown up man and woman of God.

5. An Inheritance of Suffering and Glory (8:17)

A. There is a present inheritance of Holy Spirit in 8:22 and 23.

B. There is a future inheritance of a glorified body in 8:17b.

"Adoption" is found five times in the New Testament. God the Father adopted Israel in the Old Testament (Romans 9:4), but God choose to adopt us before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:5), the Son paid for our adoption when he "redeemed them that were under the law that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Galatians 4:5), the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of adoption and also the Spirit of his Son who indwells us and enables us to cry like Jesus did to His Father, "Abba Father" (Galatians 4:6). Finally, our adoption has the future inheritance of a glorified body (Romans 8:17, 23).

C. There is also a present inheritance of suffering in 8:17.

During the Jim and Tammy Baker reign of their prosperity gospel they taught that God would make believers rich and prosperous. Tammy said, "When I tell God what car I want, I tell Him the color."

Someone said our inheritance in this verse contains hurts and hallelujahs. Because we are co-heirs with Christ, who suffered before He reigned, so must we. The cross precedes the crown (James Montgomery Boice).

Part of the suffering as a child of God is chastening from our Heavenly Father according to Hebrews 12:5-11. The writer reminded us of our God's Fatherly actions, "My son despise not the chastening of the Lord. For whom the Lord loves he chastens." God wants His children to turn out well which requires discipline. Before Dad gave me my first spanking, he set me down and told me he loved me and that he was doing this for my good. After the spanking, he held me in his arms. How much more does our Heavenly Father love us and desire "the peaceable fruit of righteousness" in our lives.

Listen to Paul in 8:18: "For I reckon, or count it to be so, that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

[\[1\]](#) Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), Ro 8:5.