

# Waiting With Wonder | Life In the Spirit

## ***“The Spirit of Sonship”***

Romans 8.14-18; Galatians 3.26-4.9  
5.17.20

*For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> 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!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

*(Galatians 3-4) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.*

*<sup>4.1</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. <sup>3</sup> So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. <sup>4</sup> But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, <sup>5</sup> so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup> Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup> Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

*<sup>8</sup> However at that time, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those which by nature are no gods. <sup>9</sup> But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?*

We've been looking at the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and Giver of Life" (Nicene Creed).

In TODAY'S sermon we confront a difficulty facing us in the spiritual life. We may not know what to call this thing but these passages gives us the "spiritual vocabulary" we need (and, I might add, the relational vocabulary). So, NOW, when we see it in ourselves we'll know what to call it... BUT, of course, we rarely DO see it in ourselves, though we often see it in others.

So, now you can use this phrase on your spouse or your kids or roommate and then maybe we can start using it on ourselves. The difficulty is called here, the “slave mentality” actually “the spirit of slavery leading again to fear” (Rom 8.15).

I’ve sometimes heard it called the “orphan mentality” – today, we’ll try to describe it and explore it a bit and then see how the gospel (core teaching of Christianity) replaces this slave-mentality with a new basis for living and relating and finally we’ll end with ideas for practicing this new way.

So, #1 – The **DIFFICULTY** (the slave/orphan mentality)

#2 – The **DOCTRINE** of Adoption (the Spirit of Sonship) and

#3 – The **DOING** (how to live like a son not a slave)

St. Paul is writing to two groups of new believers in the earliest Christian churches (in Rome and in the Region of Galatia [Turkey]) and they had all been religious people before becoming Christians.

They had probably all belonged (in some way) to either Pagan temples or Jewish synagogues BEFORE becoming Christians...and therefore...they “know how this religion thing works”; they know the ground rules (or Gal. 4.3 “elementary principles”) the basic ways we function here on planet earth. In all their former congregations, the important people were treated a little better: “transactional relationships”.

The basic rule is: “there’s no such thing as a free lunch”...it’s always “you scratch my back - I’ll scratch yours”. AND that goes for God too, “God helps those who help themselves” – “what goes around comes around”, “cause and effect”. (BTW if you’re hearing a bunch of clichés it’s because a society’s clichés, aphorisms, sayings and maxims often articulate the “elementary principles” of that society.)

But Paul is telling these young believers in Jesus Christ – “those basic rules that we apply to our marriages and parenting and in the workplace and the supermarket and in school and friendships ...rules which YOU religious people ASSUME will ALSO apply in the Jesus religion – WELL, THEY DON’T.”

THIS is the upside-down Kingdom (“Happy are those who are sad” Matt 5) and YOU people in the church have to UN-LEARN those obsolete principles.

The Gospel Community is the UN-RELIGION. Here, the ways you once identified yourself, the labels you assumed were the most important things about you, like what you do for a living, where you’re from, your marital status, your income, your ethnicity ...even your gender... THOSE THINGS that once determined your importance are now way less telling of your true status – THEY DON’T DEFINE YOU in the way they used to (much less important).

And if you don't see this, don't get it, don't bank-on-it YOU WILL LIVE A LIFE THAT IS BOUND...that is captivated and ensnared... it's a form of slavery and any obedience or virtue that comes out of that will come with strings attached ... will be from the slave mentality.

Now, what does it look like? How can you tell when this pervasive attitude, this orphan mentality or "spirit of slavery" is inspiring a person's actions/words?

Well, let's think of a couple of Biblical examples: First, the older brother in the Parable of the Prodigal Son (The Lost Sons). His brother takes his share of the inheritance and squanders it. Meanwhile, HE STAYS HOME AND CONTINUES TO BE THE HARDWORKING SON HE'S ALWAYS BEEN. Then the party-boy comes home and the father is very happy about it BUT the older son, the dutiful, "good son" is NOT happy. He's "angry". He objects. He won't go into the party. He tells his father, "All these years I've been serving ("slaving for") you; I've never neglected a command of yours; and yet you've never given me even a young goat, so I might celebrate with my friends" (Luke 15.29).

It always surprises me that he wanted to celebrate with his friends...I'm surprised he had friends! But also... why didn't he want to celebrate with the father? You get the idea that he thinks of the father more as a master to be served than a father to be celebrated...and there's a distinct tone of self-pity. He seems to be serving/slaving for what he can GET not because of WHO he is...a son...an heir...beloved.

Then there's Jonah... the Hebrew prophet called to go to Nineveh...to warn the enemies of Israel to repent of their wickedness. At first, Jonah looks like the younger son in the parable. He runs away/wastes. Then, when this wicked city repents, at the end of the book, Jonah looks like the older brother and he can't share God's joy... Jonah is better than those Pagans from Nineveh and he wants them to get what's coming to them...Of course he's glad God gave him grace when he acted like a runaway slave!

Once again, we find self-pity, anger, jealousy, complaining and a forced obedience unconcerned with the heart and purpose of God – only compliant to avoid punishment. Moved by fear, an apparently obedient life that's actually only a calculated goodness, self-protective, self-promoting, selfISH. It's forced compliance that's always "lookin' out for #1": stemming FROM fear and leading again TO fear. We saw it in the garden when the serpent asks, "Has God really said...? Surely there's reason to be suspicious that He's withholding some good thing... surely there's reason to fear."

The enemy wants to corrupt the motive of obedience from bounty to scarcity, from privilege and trust (God is Father and knows best) to burden/suspicion. It stems from fear and leads to fear.

"But YOU", said Paul to these young Christians, "You are all sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ". The new status makes all the difference.

SO, how did it happen?

Well, none of us is BORN into this status; instead we're chosen into it. God Himself planned it (Eph 1.5) and He carried it out. He did it by coming, in the Person of Jesus Christ, the eternal SON. He's sent into the world, like Jonah had been sent to God's enemies but THIS Prophet, Jesus Christ (the Better Jonah; Luke 11.30) He comes as a SON and as the Heir whose heart is ONE with the mercy and purpose of the Father.

He comes identifying with us. He's born of a woman and becomes JUST like us but without sin. Then He takes on OUR obligations and keeps the Law of God that we all fail to keep – He always loves and obeys His Father NOT simply out of fear but willingly and joyfully – it's His food to obey (John 4.34). "Born of a woman, born under the Law" – born to obey IN MY PLACE.

And then He carries, not only my obligation, but also my penalty. He dies under the sentence of justice that I deserved... (v.5) "that HE might redeem those who were under the Law".

And THEN He releases the status of Son that is rightfully His. Under the Father's justice He is charged with MY sin and Jesus Christ loses the right to address God as Father. So, from the Cross, He cries out NOT "ABBA!" as He'd always prayed, NOT "Papa" but simply, "My God! My God!" and in that moment He surrenders/shares His status so that slaves and rebels could cry out, "Abba! Father!", "that we might receive the adoption as sons." (v.5).

And in this adoption we become NO SECOND CLASS, half-children, but heirs and sons – the full rights of family membership are conferred irrevocably. The old writers put it this way, "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God". (WSC 1.34)

AND then AS God the Father dispatched the Son to share His status and make sonship available to slaves and rebels... NOW the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life and He communicates this adoption to us...He applies it and awakens us to it and He tunes our hearts to resonate with the heart of the Father, to sense and feel that we are indeed INCLUDED and BELONG to this family: "Because you ARE sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" – intimacy instead of insecurity – "Abba".

And out of that intimacy, out of that sense of inclusion and belonging comes an obedience that's free – not calculated or self-protective. There's trust instead of just MUST – "this is the God who gave everything for me...the God I can trust even if the path He chooses involves suffering (and it always does) – this is MY ABBA." He will lead me home. He will make my heart, my motives, my character to be like my true older Brother, Jesus Christ. I can trust this Father not only to call me son but to then remake me into the family likeness. The SPIRIT of Sonship - a very different motive of obedience than the slave mentality – freedom NOT fear.

Now, “THE DOING”; first a question and then some practical ways to put this all to use:

The QUESTION IS, “Are YOU a child of God?”

The Bible does teach that God knows every person and that He sustains every person and that every person owes his/her existence to God...in that sense we’re all the offspring of God (Acts 17.28) BUT the Bible does NOT teach that all people are the children of God in the way we’ve described this morning. It is NOT a sonship by birth (there’s only ONE of those, Jesus Christ the only eternal Son; begotten not made). But for US, it’s by adoption.

Now YOUR question may be, “Well, how do I know if I’M ADOPTED into the family of God, if I’m counted in the number?” (as the catechism puts it).

The Gospel of John opens with these words (v.12) “But as many as received Him, to THEM He gave the right to become children of God, i.e. to those who believe in His name...”

Today’s passage says the same, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” We enter into our adoption... by trust...through faith...“to those who believe in His name He gave the right of being the children of God.” You simply come to rest in the work that Jesus Christ accomplished. You receive it as a gift – rest and receive – you see yourself as the rebel-slave and lawbreaker you are and see Jesus Christ – living, dying, rising for you and you make that your new source of confidence.

And what happens to everyone who transfers his/her trust AWAY from self and onto Jesus Christ is that... you will begin to...cry. This text says God will send His own heart into the heart of His adopted children. Listen: “and you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

“Cry out” (κράζω) actually means to “scream” as in a moment of crisis or emergency. When you find yourself in trouble you will find yourself screaming ...crying out...not to some distant deity but to the Living God WHO, because of Jesus Christ is no longer angry with you but CONSIDERS YOU HIS OWN INFINITELY LOVED CHILD. That will begin to be the response of your heart as you live. As you face temptation or trouble, God’s Heart or Spirit gives you the impulse to CRY “Abba”.

That’s what it means to be led by the Spirit of God you become more and more secure in your adoption. And you identify more and more with Jesus Christ as He identified with YOU. He became like us so we could become like Him.

Now a few practical ideas about the doing: FIRST, notice there are no imperatives in either of these texts. This is not about OUR doing but about God’s doing. This is NOT Law but GOSPEL. And Gospel is something we receive/believe and it works on us.

Second, there's still a practical response: it ends with a question mark. Listen: "But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how is it that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again?" (Gal 4.9)

The point is that sometimes slaves look very obedient and excellent and have a great form or what Luther called, "Civil Righteousness". Sometimes slaves look like great people. AND there are also times when SONS look like slaves. We can drift back into this "I gotta do for God so He will do for me" – orphan mentality. Fear. Calculated obedience. Or "I have to let these people KNOW what I DO, what I HAVE because if I don't I'm afraid they won't like me or respect me." "I have to get appreciated or recognized..." Your fears will alert you to this slave mentality coming back: "Follow the fears" and listen to the words – anger, self-pity, boasting, complaining are signs of the orphan mentality.

And...weirdly...there's something very attractive about it. The children of Israel wanted to go back into slavery in Egypt...weird. But it's good to spot it in yourself – its elementary - WE ALL DO IT... and it robs us.

It's more comfortable to live by sight...to simply depend on ourselves (and status symbols you can SEE) instead of depending on our Father and the invisible Spirit. Being a son feels a bit strange to people who have been enslaved. A slave says, "Just tell me what to do and I'll do it!"

Even if you had an absentee father or neglectful or abusive – coming to God through Jesus introduces you to the Perfect Father – who knows you (v.9!!) and can be always trusted to be FOR YOU!

Learn to practice this new identity and look for it to be more important than anything else that could be said about you! Learn to pray that seven-syllable prayer:

"Abba, I belong to YOU."