

Adopted into God's Family

By Rev. Rodney Kleyn

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Romans 8:14-17
Preached on: Sunday, June 19, 2022

Grace Protestant Reformed Church

O-11225 8th Ave NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534

Website: www.graceprc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/graceprc

Let's open in God's word this evening to the book of Romans 8. Romans 8, we'll begin reading at verse 12 and we'll read through verse 28. Romans 8 from verse 12 through verse 29 actually. Romans 8:12 this is God, holy and inspired word.

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. 13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. 15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. 18 For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. 19 For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 20 For the creature [that is, the creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21 Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23 And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. 24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? 25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. 26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. 27 And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he

also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

We read this far in the holy and inspired word of God. I'm going to read verses 14 through 17 again, these will be the verses that we consider, and particularly in these verses the biblical concept of adoption.

14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.
15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: 17 And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

I think it's obvious to all of you tonight why these words have been chosen for the sermon this evening. Even though Steven and Sarah have had Emma in their home with them since she was a toddler, only recently was her adoption finalized and this adoption story is a beautiful story of this godly couple opening their hearts and their lives to Emma, to give her in their home a place of love and provision and protection, and then beyond the earthly home and family, there's a spiritual dimension to this beautiful story of adoption, and it's the story of God's plan and care and love for Emma, bringing her into this Christian home, and as we saw tonight in baptism, into his covenant. And that earthly story of baptism is just a picture to us of another more beautiful story. Some of you are familiar with adoption, some as adults have taken children into your family in similar ways, bestowed on them family love, given them such a place of safety and provision and love and care and instruction and nurture, and some of you as children adopted have been brought into such loving homes and you don't know and you couldn't imagine life any other way except that you know this, that apart from the story of adoption, things could be very different for you. From a Spiritual point of view, tonight, as believers who belong to the family of God, we realize something very similar for ourselves. This is what salvation is really in one word, it's to be adopted into God's family. Adopted.

The Bible uses this word adoption as one way of describing our salvation. It uses other words too, and perhaps these different words are related to different aspects or attributes of the being of God. So justification describes our salvation. It's the declaration by a just God that he sees us as righteous, as though we never had had nor committed any sin. Sanctification is another word to describe our salvation, a different aspect of our salvation, but it describes the work of a holy God by his Holy Spirit making us holy, setting us apart, and then working by his Spirit in us so that we also live lives that are holy and in consecration to him. Well, adoption as a word that describes our salvation, describes a relationship to God and describes God as a God of tender, fatherly, parental love, and describes us being brought into that family, embraced and cared for by God, that we who were strangers and orphans are received into the family of God. And this too, he tells us we're adopted. He wants us to know that we're his children and he wants us to know that he loves us with a tender, fatherly love.

So tonight, I want us to think about this under the theme "Adopted into God's Family." Notice first, the marvelous story of our adoption and then the real experience of our adoption. The marvelous story and then the real experience. This is your story as a believer. Maybe some of you know Christians who have been converted later in life and you're fascinated by their story, the story of God's grace in their lives as he brought them from a way of rebellion and sin and unbelief and turned them, converted them and brought them to himself. And you think to yourself, "Well, I don't really have a testimony like that. I don't really have a story to tell." Well, this is your story, this is my story and I encourage you to use the story of your adoption into God's family as the way to describe your salvation, to give your testimony to unbelievers. It's a beautiful, wonderful story. "God has adopted me." that's your story, that's my story.

Your witness and your story is not just that you were born and raised and nurtured in a Christian home, instructed in the Christian faith and so you've adopted the faith of your parents, your witness is not just setting before others the arguments for the Christian faith and the biblical arguments for your doctrinal positions and convictions, your witness to others is that you've been delivered from Satan's family, that you've been taken from the clutches and the possession of the devil and you've been brought into God's family, found, loved, changed, cared for by a tender God whom Jesus teaches us to call our Father. 1 John 3m I saw this in your bulletin, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath given unto us, that we should be called the sons of God." What manner of love, whoever heard of such a love as this, that we should be called the sons of God. Do you marvel tonight at that wonder?

In the first part of the sermon tonight, I want us to see and understand this beautiful truth of our adoption by drawing parallels to the earthly picture of adoption, and there are seven things I want to say about this, if you're taking notes. The first is this, that adoption is something that's planned. Adoption is something that happens by parental decision. In this way, it's a little bit different than having a child naturally; certainly, there's some planning that goes into having children naturally, but most often it's a surprise and you're following the surprise with your plans. Usually when a woman becomes pregnant and then all the things that follow, gender, personality, looks, these are all surprises to us. But adoption, instead of that or in contrast to that, is usually done with much more thought and preparation and prayer. We could say this adoption is not a receiving process, but it's a decision-making process. And our adoption into the family of God is like that. God doesn't simply receive us as his children but God decides to make us his children. He doesn't receive us as a gift but he finds us and he bestows his love upon us.

And that plan for our adoption is really God's eternal plan in predestination and the working out of that plan in history involves God, as we read here Romans 8, using everything in our lives to conform us to the image of his Son, to make us his children. And so this is what we read in the Ephesians 1:4-5, "According as he hath chosen us in him," that is, in Christ, "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children

by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." God in eternity decides who will be his children. He plans it.

So that first, adoption is something that's planned, and it has to do with God's eternal love for us in Jesus Christ, and that eternal love that God has for us in Jesus Christ is an immutable and unchanging love, planned. Second, adoption is costly and anyone familiar with having children understands this but especially anyone who's familiar with adoption understands this. Someone told me recently who was contemplating adoption, that it was going to cost them \$30-\$50,000 and they would have to put a mortgage on their home to afford it. And the costs are much more than financial in the planning to have children by adoption. There's time. There is commitment. There are the stresses. And when you become a parent, this is something that you do for life till the day you die. The joys and the pains of parenting, and that's the beauty of adoption, isn't it, that as parents plan to do it, they count the cost and out of love they find their joy in the sacrificial love of adoption.

And again, that's the biblical picture of our adoption into God's family. In Galatians 4:4-5, "when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." In Romans 8, God sending forth his Son is described this way: he spared not his own Son but gave him up for us all. The price that God paid to adopt you and to bring you into his family was the price of his own Son. What a cost. In scripture, that's the price really of redemption for freeing a slave, and that's what God did to set us free from the claims of Satan.

So first adoption is planned. Second, it's costly. Third, adoption is deliverance, and you see how this is closely tied to the idea that being costly and this fits with the biblical practice or idea of adoption. Adoption in the New Testament times, especially in the Greek and Roman world, involved somebody who was very wealthy picking out one of his servants or slaves and finding one whom he thought was capable and trustworthy, and delivering them from their position of being a slave to being an heir so that in the end the one who was owned became the owner, and he was set free from his slavery, and there are definitely parallels to adoption today. Many adopted children are saved from even abortion. Many come from orphanages where they subsist on a bare minimum. Others are saved from bad situations or even taken from the street, or perhaps just handed over. And from a spiritual point of view, that's the story of our adoption as well. God doesn't actually find us as abandoned infants, but God finds us as the children of Satan, rebels with evil hearts under Satan's power, and the devil is fighting to keep us, fighting for our custody, as it were, and God comes and delivers. He sets us free. That's the story of Israel in Egypt in the Old Testament. God delivered his son from the bondage of Egypt and to them were committed the adoptions,. Romans 9 and verse 4. And so in salvation, God delivers me from the clutches and the power of Satan and gives us, the Bible calls it, the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Planned. Costly. It's deliverance. And then, fourth, adoption is legal, that is, it involves a change in legal status. You can't just go out on the street and find any child and claim it

for your own, you don't have the legal rights to just any child, and sometimes those legal battles can go on for years. There's a legal aspect to adoption and that's true in our adoption by God. There are legal realities that have to be worked through. Satan had a claim to us on account of our sin. We deserved wrath and judgment and hell. There's a law that we have broken and there's a righteousness that has to be maintained and satisfied, a God who's angry against sin, who has said that the wages of sin is death and the transaction, the legal transaction that takes place to make us the rightful children of God is what took place at the cross of Calvary where Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, where he satisfied for our sins, where he paid the price to set us free and where we were brought nigh by the blood of Jesus Christ. Legal.

But then, fifth, there's also a relational aspect to adoption, and now you have to understand the difference between the two, relational and legal. You can understand this very well when you think of the process of adoption, especially the process of an international adoption. All the legal material has to be dealt with first. The paperwork, the legal things have to be cleared out of the way and then the parents get to go to the orphanage to get the child. And legally, that child is theirs but relationally they are strangers to one another, and they have to get to know one another and have to build trust, and it says the adoptive parents surround the child with love and care that the child grows into that relationship, there is a relational aspect and that's true of our adoption as the children of God as well. It's not just legal, but it's rich and relational. We're brought into the family of God and God is a tender loving father and Jesus, the natural Son of God, who is our older brother affirms to us constantly his love and the Father's love.

And that's emphasized here in Romans 8:15, this idea of relationship, "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption." It reminds us of the words of Jesus to his disciples, "I don't call you anymore servants but friends." The spirit of bondage to fear is the spirit of slavery. We are not God's slaves in the sense that we are driven by a slavish fear in our relationship to him, but we are God's adopted children and we are motivated by love. And so we cry out, Romans 15, Romans 8:15 says, "Abba, Father." And Father is the legal term and Abba is the term of affection. We're brought into this rich relationship and in that rich relationship, you, as it were, don't have to check the adoption papers to see whether you're child of God, you know it by that relationship, by the care and the tender love of the Father, and there's a confidence, then, that comes in that relationship.

So adoption is planned, it's costly, it's a deliverance, it's legal, it's relationship, it's relational, and then in the sixth place, adoption is transforming. We can say it's powerful. We are, as children, shaped by our experiences in the home in which we are brought up and living in such relationships and living in the community of a family in a home has a powerful impact on a child. And so an adopted child who grows up in a healthy home may bear very little physical resemblance to the adoptive parents but will learn all the habits and the ways and the manners of that home. And if this is a Christian environment, by God's grace, they'll learn to love God and to love his word, and it's something for which they become eternally grateful that God put them into that. And that's what Romans 8:14 means when it says from a spiritual point of view that we are led by the

Spirit of God, and because of that we are the sons of God. The work of the Holy Spirit, and you see that later in this chapter, is to make us into the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, to make us more and more like Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And that's the continual work of the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, and as God gives to us children, it's our desired that that will be true of them, and so we bring them under the means of grace with the confidence that God will use this to awaken them spiritually and to make them like his Son, Jesus Christ.

And then finally in the seventh place, there are great privileges in adoption. And we've talked already about the legal and the relational aspects of adoption, and there are great privileges that fit into both those categories, there are great legal privileges and there are great relational privileges. Legally, an adopted child has the rights to parental care and to an inheritance. Relationally, the adopted child has someone to turn to, someone to trust, someone whose love they can seek out. And adoption ensures their care and secures their future, and that's true with regard to our spiritual adoption as the children of God as well. We are heirs, that's our great privilege here in verse 17, if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. We have the same privileges in the end as the natural Son of God.

And think about those privileges: prayer, access to God, and heirs, heirs of all things. And Jesus puts it this way in Matthew 5, "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. They shall inherit the earth." Paul says, "All things are yours and ye are Christ's and Christ is God's," and he means that everything in heaven and earth which is owned by our heavenly Father, is, as it were, at our disposal and that's here in Romans 8, not just all things but everything that happens as well. Romans 8:28, "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God." It's talking about the way that God in his parental love for us, in order to make us more and more like his Son, moves everything in heaven and earth for our good.

One commentator puts it this way, "The unbeliever may have many things, but really, he can enjoy none of them because they are not his, whereas the believer receives everything that comes to him as his possession from God." Think about that. Food, family, children, health, riches. They shall inherit the earth. God brings and gives all those things to us from God for us to use with joy, knowing that they're from his fatherly hand but that's true also of sickness and grief and sorrow, and the troubles of life. These also come from God as a part of his wise love for our profit.

And so children, it says here in verse 17 who are heirs who will suffer with him so that we may be glorified together. And then think of the privilege of prayer. We're speaking of the great privileges of adoption, but the privilege of prayer is something like the access that a child has to a parent. We have a place to go, we have one to go to in the midst of this world and that's the one whom Jesus says, "Pray, Our Father, which art in heaven." Our Father, that's the name for every needy child to use, and we come to God through Jesus Christ with great childlike confidence.

So think tonight of the wonders and the beauties of adoption. It's planned. It's costly. It's deliverance. It's legal. It's relational. It's transforming. And it comes with great privileges. That this describes your story as a Christian and as a child of God. God has adopted you into his family. The second point of the sermon I've labeled "The Real Experience of Our Adoption." The real experience of our adoption, and now I want you to see the role of the Holy Spirit. God wants us to know that we are his children. It is, as I said earlier, not just a legal thing, but a relational thing, and if you look at these verses, you see that this is the role of the Holy Spirit. In verse 15, we "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." And that describes a relationship to God. By the Spirit of adoption we cry out, "Abba, Father." What's the Spirit's work? Well, the Spirit's work is, first of all, rebirth, he regenerates us. We are born from above so that we become the children of God through regeneration, and then the Spirit works in us, in our hearts a filial, that is, a childlike love for God so that our affection is towards God. We desire him. We love him. And that's the work of God's Spirit.

And then verse 16 says that besides being the spirit of adoption, he's the Spirit that witnesses with our spirit that we are the children of God. That is, he gives us a testimony. He speaks to us. He tells us. He assures us. Remember when Jesus was departing, he gave many promises to his disciples concerning the Holy Spirit. "I will not leave you comfortless. I will come unto you. I will send the Comforter. He will abide with you forever." And there are many different aspects to the work that the Holy Spirit is busy with, but his main work with you and me as God's children is this work to give testimony to our spirit that we are the children of God, to work assurance in our hearts. A

And how does he do that? How does he tell us that we are God's children? Well, first of all, he does that by the promises of the word of God, and even the promises of the sacrament of baptism, as we saw it tonight. The Holy Spirit is giving us this promise and these promises that come to us from the word of God as something like bread that a parent gives to a child, day-by-day. And as the child is fed day-by-day, the child knows the care of the parent for them. And the word of God is something like that. God has given to us promises for every spiritual ailment that we might face in our life. The word of God is filled with such promises, and the Spirit gives us in scripture everything that we need to know about our Father, all that we need for faith and for life. The word of God is, we could say, as it's inspired and written by the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is the author, it's God's love letter to us to tell us as his children, "This is who I am. This is how I love you. This is what I've done to receive you into my family. I've given my Son. I've forgiven your sins." And so on.

But then along with that, the Spirit gives an inner testimony, that inner testimony of the Spirit is not something that comes separate from or apart from the scripture as some kind of secret voice that we hear, but the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit is this, that when we read the promises of the word of God and when they are biblically explained to us, they resonate with our soul, and we say, "That's my Father. That describes my desire for God. This is food for my soul." And the word of God, then, becomes a witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. We call that the effectual call. The external word of

God, the call of the gospel, accompanied by the internal witness of the Spirit so that we are effectually called by the word of God.

Perhaps you've heard effectual call described this way, that children are playing in the street and a mother calls the children for supper. She opens the window and she yells, "Dinnertime!" And only the children come who recognize that that's the voice of their mother. And the gospel call is something like that. It doesn't have an effect for everyone. To some it comes and they say, "That's not for me. I'm not one of God's children." But it comes to those who have the testimony of the Spirit and they say, "Yes, God is my Father and I come to him through his Son."

So the Spirit God uses in the gospel call because God wants us to know that we are his children. We could put it this way tonight as we've described adoption, as we've described God's care as a tender father, as we've described deliverance from sin, does this resonate in your soul? You say, "God is my Father. I'm his child." Then that's the testimony of the Spirit. The opposite, of course, is that you don't care, that you go on with things in your own way of rebelling, that you, as Jesus describes it, have the devil as your father, that you do his works, that you, like Esau, despise the blessings and the promises.

So God gives us the Spirit because he wants us to know that we are his children, and he gives us the word through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit because he wants us to hear his promises to us as his children. And he says, "You're mine." I say this is the real experience of the children of God. What is it that the adopted children of God experience? And I think there are three things we can say that we experience. So first of all this, that verse 14, we are led by the Spirit of God, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." And what does it mean, then, to be led by the Spirit of God? Well, it means to be led in the ways of God's word. When we speak of being led by the Spirit of God, it's not just you have some kind of mystical experience, and you think, "Well, God's Spirit is calling me to do this or to do that." No, we're directed by the will of God as that's revealed in the scripture, but to be led by the Spirit of God is to be led in sanctification.

This is what it is to be born of the Spirit and to be born from above, and this is described for us in 1 John 3, "What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God." And then it says this, "Therefore, the world knoweth us not because it knew him not." The world doesn't get it when we're led by the Spirit of God, it doesn't understand us. And you can go further down in 1 John 3 and see that in verse 10, "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil." There's a difference between the two, and that difference is manifest, it's clear. And how is it made clear? "Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." So to be led by the Spirit of God is to walk in the ways of righteousness, it's to be filled with the love of God so that you love your brother. And that's a part of the testimony and the experience, then, of being a child of God.

But there's more that we experience, and that's put here in verse 17 at the very end of the passage. Romans 8:1, "if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,"

and then this," if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Children of God suffer with him, that is, they suffer with Jesus Christ. They bear a cross, they carry across after their Savior. And it's our privilege as God's children to share in the suffering of Jesus Christ so that we may also share in his glory, and that's the wonderful promise that Jesus gives in Matthew 5, "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely." And then he says, "This is the way they persecuted the prophets that were before you. There's an identity that you share in this persecution and in this suffering for my name." And he says, "Blessed are the persecuted, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

So it's in the experience of suffering as Christian and suffering for Christ that we also know and experience really that we are children of God, and that suffering is in the end a testimony of the Father's love for us. This is what we see very clearly in the book of Hebrews 12, "no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous," and it's making a comparison here between the chastening that we receive from God in our lives and the chastening that we receive from earthly parents, fathers, it says according to the flesh. And we gave them reverence, "They chastened us for a few days after their own pleasure, but he for our profit that we might be partakers of his holiness." And it says, "if we be without chastening, whereof all are partakers, then are we illegitimate childre, and not sons. If you endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with children. What son is he whom his father chastens not?" And so the suffering that we bear in this life which is the chastening hand of the Lord, sometimes a chastening that comes to us as a result of our own sin to correct us, other times a chastening that comes simply to make us stronger as Christians, this also is a testimony of the real experience of the children of God. If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified together.

So this is your testimony as a Christian, this is my testimony and story as a Christian, adopted and brought into the family of God. Amen.

Father, we thank thee for the beautiful pictures in the scripture of our salvation and tonight, this beautiful picture in adoption. And we have it as an earthly picture in the reality of adoption, parental love bestowed on a child who's cared for, who's nurtured. We pray that this love may continue in the home of Stephen and Sarah and then that we may be reminded through this of the wonder that we are brought into thy family. And as we experience very really suffering, help us to remember that this is a part of thy fatherly hand towards us to conform us and make us more like thy Son, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.