

A Study in the Book of Romans

17

Romans 8:9-17

Key Verses

“ For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.”

In the last lesson, we saw how **Romans 8** could easily be called “the chapter of the Spirit.” As we progress through this chapter, Paul is uncovering, layer upon layer, the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life.

The Indwelling Spirit

Paul begins to describe the fullness of life that is ours because we have God’s Spirit indwelling us. Man is a triune being – body, soul and spirit (**1 Thessalonians 5: 23**) – created in the image of a triune God (note **Matthew 28:19; Ephesians 2:18**). The salvation won for us by Christ, and imparted to us by the Holy Spirit, transforms our whole being – body, soul and spirit!

The soul – controlled by the Spirit

Read Romans 8:8-9

The soul is our personality. It is our mind, our emotions and our will. Having stated that those who are controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God, Paul now emphasises that this is our past experience – *before* we came to Christ. Our experience now, as those in whom the Spirit of God dwells, is that we are no longer controlled by the sinful nature, but are controlled by the Spirit. This is life to our souls (**8:6**).

Introduction

The Gospel’s Three Revelations

▶ **The Gospel’s Three Answers** ◀

The Gospel’s Answer to Israel

The Gospel in Action

Conclusion

The spirit – made alive by the Spirit

Read Romans 8:10

The spirit is that part of us, deep within, through which we have contact with God. As **Proverbs 20:27** describes it:

“The lamp of the Lord searches the spirit of a man; it searches out his inmost being.”

This is the first ministry of the Holy Spirit in salvation. He makes our spirits – which had been “dead” (cut off from God because of sin) – alive, enabling us to experience relationship and fellowship with God.

Read Titus 3:4-7

When God first created man, he “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being” (**Genesis 2:7**). The animals had already been created and were alive on the earth, yet nowhere does it record that God “breathed” the breath of life into them.

That breath was, in fact, the very Spirit of God. The Hebrew word *neshamah* used here also means “wind” or “spirit.” Man was created a spiritual being. The Lord warned Adam that if he should sin, in that day he would die (**Genesis 2:17; 3:2-3**). Adam did sin, but he did not die physically that day. The death he experienced was spiritual death – the “breath of God” left him! The death of his spirit deep within began to work out through his whole being. His soul came under the control of sin. He knew what shame and guilt and fear were. Finally, his body reaped the effects in physical death.

After the Cross and the Resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples as they were gathered together. His work as the “sin-bearer” was complete. He had risen triumphantly as the beginning of a new creation. Now, as his first act, he “breathes” on the disciples and says, “Receive the Holy Spirit!” – reenacting the original moment of man’s creation. For the first time since Adam’s sin, man once again had the Spirit of life indwelling him. His spirit was again alive!

Read Ephesians 2:1-5

This is the Spirit’s first ministry to each of us as we believe in Christ. The breath of God is breathed into us and the indwelling Spirit of God makes our spirits alive. And now, step by step, the life we receive is working out through our whole being.

Firstly, the life of the Spirit within is working out through our soul. Our mind is being renewed, our will is being conformed to God’s will, and our emotions are being healed and transformed. As Paul expresses later, in **Romans 12:2**:

“Do not conform any long to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

And Peter also declares in **1 Peter 1:8-9**:

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an expressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

Finally, at the return of the Lord Jesus, the life of the Spirit will complete its work of restoration and salvation – and our body will be made alive.

The body – quickened by the Spirit

Read Romans 8:11

In **1 Corinthians 15:26**, Paul tells us: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death.” The final expression of our complete salvation through Christ will be seen at his second coming. All those who loved the Lord and who have died will be raised again with a perfect body. Those who are still alive at his coming will be changed in the “twinkling of an eye.” The change in our spirit and soul has already taken place through the indwelling Spirit of God, but this time the last vestige of the effects of sin will be removed, for the transformation which will take place will be in the physical body, and we will be “clothed with immortality.”

Read 1 Corinthians 15:35-57

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18

This will be the final triumph of Christ’s work on the Cross and in his Resurrection – when death itself will be conquered. But this victory is already being expressed, not only in our spirit and soul, but also in our physical body. Physical strength and health are now among the promises given to the child of God.

Read James 5:14-15

In view of all this, our obligation is to live according to all that has been accomplished for us by Christ and made available to us by his Spirit (**8:12-13**). We owe it to the Lord first of all, for he is the one who has paid the greatest price to make it possible (**1 Corinthians 6:20; 1 Peter 1:18-19**). And we owe it to ourselves, for if we don’t live in what has been made possible, we miss out on the greatest treasure available to man! (**2 Corinthians 4:6-7**). We would be like a pauper who had been given a blank check signed by the richest man in the world. Instead of cashing the check and living according to his new-found wealth, he put the check in his pocket and continued to live as though he still had nothing.

God’s Ultimate Intention

Read Romans 8:14

Now Paul declares the wonder of all wonders! The purpose of all Christ’s work is not only that we might be forgiven; not only that we might receive eternal life, or even life forever in God’s presence; nor is it only that the Holy Spirit might indwell us. All these are but the means to the end. Paul now reveals that those who are living according to all that has been done, and are led, or guided, by the Spirit in their lives, are demonstrating the relationship they have been brought into

through all that Christ has done. They are sons of God!

All that Paul has revealed so far in his letter – of God’s intervention into human need and his complete work of salvation on our behalf – he now brings to its glorious climax. God has a wonderful, ultimate intention behind it all, and that is that we might be brought into a new relationship with him. We are no longer like slaves struggling to obey an awesome Master. The Spirit given within us is “the Spirit of sonship” (NIV) or “the Spirit of adoption” (KJV). We are God’s children!

The Message captures the wonder of this glorious revelation:

“This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It’s adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike ‘What’s next, Papa?’ God’s Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children.”

Let’s take a look at how some other Bible versions translate the remarkable declaration of **Romans 8:16**:

- ☞ **New King James Version** – “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”
- ☞ **New International Version** – “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”
- ☞ **New Century Version** – “And the Spirit himself joins with our spirits to say we are God’s children.”
- ☞ **New Living Translation** – “For his Holy Spirit speaks to us deep in our hearts and tells us that we are God’s children.”
- ☞ **The New Testament in Modern English** – “The Spirit himself endorses our inward conviction that we really are the children of God.”
- ☞ **The Amplified Bible** – “The Spirit Himself [thus] testifies together with our own spirit, [assuring us] that we are children of God.”

The indwelling Spirit gives us the evidence that we are children of God in three ways:

In our outward lives

Read again Romans 8:14

The Spirit of God leads those who are his children. This is the outward evidence of the relationship we have with him. His hand is upon us to guide us and direct us throughout our lives – and his leading is not aimless. He has an ultimate goal. In the phrase “those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God,” Paul chooses a word in the Greek that is a term used not for young children but for adult sons. The Greek word for children is *teknon*, but the word Paul uses here is *huois*. In other words, the purpose of the Holy Spirit’s leading in our lives is to bring us to full spiritual maturity of adult sons. As Paul expresses it in **Ephesians 4:13**:

“Until we all...become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”

The Holy Spirit is given to us to guide us into all truth (**John 16:13-15; 14:26**). A guide is one who leads people into areas not yet experienced by them. Thus, the Holy Spirit is not just our Teacher, who reveals the *knowledge* of the truth; He is also our guide into the *possession* of that truth – so that the truth becomes experience in our daily lives.

As we respond and submit to the leading of the Holy Spirit, we demonstrate the growth to spiritual maturity that is taking place in our lives. The leading of the Spirit is not spasmodic. It is meant to be the believer’s constant experience, for it is the result of being “free-born” children of God (**Galatians 4:28-31; 5:18**), born of the Spirit (**John 1:12-13; 1 Peter 2:2**) and growing, by the Spirit, to the full maturity of Christ (**Romans 8:29-30**).

In our relationship to God

Read Romans 8:15

Suddenly in the midst of writing in Greek, the official language of his day, Paul inserts a word from his native tongue, Aramaic. It was a word from home – “Abba.” This was the expression used by children in Palestine in addressing their father in the intimate atmosphere of family affection. It was the equivalent to our use today of “Papa” or “Daddy.”

Paul does this to emphasize the kind of relationship we have now been brought into. God is not our Father in an austere, impersonal way. “Abba” speaks of an intimate, loving relationship between a father and his child. Fear is no longer our heart’s motivation towards God. Love is. The Holy Spirit fills us with the knowledge of His love for us, and awakens our love for Him so that our heart’s cry to Him now is “Abba, Father!”

Read Romans 5:5

Read 1 John 4:8-10,16

“Abba” was the expression that Jesus himself used when speaking to God, His Father (**Mark 14:36**). When writing to the Galatians about this same wonderful truth of our new-found relationship, Paul says that the Spirit sent into our hearts is the “Spirit of his Son” who “calls out ‘Abba, Father’” (**Galatians 4:6-7**). In other words, the same Spirit indwelling the Lord Jesus, which caused the Father to proclaim for all to hear, “You are my Son, whom I love...” (**Mark 1:10-11; Matthew 17:5**), is the same “Spirit of sonship” that we have received!

Now, what is true of the Lord Jesus because he is a Son *by right* and *by nature* has become true of us – because we have been made sons *by grace*!

- He was led by the Spirit (**Luke 4:1**) – so are we (**Romans 8:14**).
- He cried “Abba, Father” (**Mark 14:36**) – we now also cry “Abba, Father” (**Romans 8:15**).

- He is the Heir of all things (**Hebrews 1:2**) – we are now heirs with him (**Romans 8:17**).
- God’s love was poured out on Christ (**John 17:24**) – God’s love is now poured out on us (**John 17:23; Romans 5:5; 1 John 3:1**).
- He is seated upon his Father’s throne (**Mark 16:19**) – we are now seated upon his throne in Christ (**Ephesians 2:6; Revelation 3:21**).
- All power and authority belongs to him (**Matthew 28:18**) – the same power and authority is ours because we are in him (**Ephesians 1:23; 2:6**).
- He has complete victory over his enemies (**Colossians 2:15; Revelation 17:14**) – we have the same victory (**Luke 10:19; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8; Ephesians 1:20-23; 2:6**).

In our inward hearts

Read Romans 8:16

When Paul says “the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children,” he is using the picture of Roman adoption as it was then. The adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. It was their responsibility in future, should there be any contention, to swear to the genuineness of the adoption. Thus Paul is saying that the Holy Spirit dwelling within us (note that he is called the seven-fold Spirit of God in **Revelation 1:4**) is the one who swears to the genuineness of our adoption as children of God. He bears witness with our spirit – in other words, our own spirit also gives testimony to this truth. The Holy Spirit and our own hearts stand firm against any contrary accusation of the devil, for both testify within us that we are indeed children of God.

To understand fully the wonder of all that Paul is expressing **Romans 8:14-23**, it is necessary to understand the picture he is using as an illustration. The Roman ceremony of adoption in Paul’s day was very different to adoption as we know it today. It was not, as we think of today, a family adopting a little orphan baby into their home. In Roman and Greek society, there were, in fact, two aspects to adoption, both of which Paul uses in this passage – the first in **verse 15** and the second in **verse 23**. The first was a private arrangement between the parties, and the other a formal and public declaration of the fact. We’ll be looking at **verse 23** in **ES109-19**, but here let us consider the first aspect of Roman adoption Paul uses as an illustration.

The Private Adoption

It was quite customary, if a Roman citizen had no heir, for him to adopt one of his slaves as his son and heir. (Remember, long before, even Abraham had thought he would have to do this with his servant, Eliezer, before Isaac was born – see **Genesis 15:2-4**). Sometimes the Roman would purchase a slave at the market specifically for the purpose of adoption. The Roman custom of adoption is described very well in Lew Wallace’s novel “Ben Hur.” Judah Ben Hur, as the story goes, is a Jewish youth unjustly convicted of a crime, and is sentenced as a slave to spend

the rest of his life rowing beneath the deck of a Roman galley-ship. After a while, Judah's ship is sunk during a battle at sea. He manages to survive, and in the process rescues the commander of the Roman fleet, who then takes Judah home with him, obtains his pardon, and adopts him into the family. This act marked a dramatic change in the life of Judah Ben Hur. From obscurity, slavery and disgrace, he suddenly becomes an honored Roman citizen and heir to the fortunes of his new father. With his father's name he gains the respect and honor earned by his new-found position, all the privileges of being a Roman citizen of that day, and inherits not only the wealth of his father, but also his reputation and the heritage of the family line.

Adoption in Roman days was the transferring of a young man from one family and heritage to another family with a totally different heritage. It meant three dramatic changes in the adopted one's life:

A change of relationship

From being a slave, suddenly now he is a son! His father discusses the family business and affairs with him. They enjoy one another's company. But, above all, they share the special love of a father and son. But Paul takes it even further than a natural adoption could go. He says that we have received "the spirit of adoption" (KJV). It is not just a legal transaction verified on a document for us. It is the imparting of the very Spirit of the Father to us! This is why Paul writes in **8:15**, as rendered by *The Living Bible*:

"And so we should not be like cringing, fearful slaves, but we should behave like God's very own children, adopted into his family, and calling him, 'Father, Father.'"

A change of heritage

The adopted son lost all connection to his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family. According to Roman law, his old life was completely wiped out – all his debts were cancelled and any known crime was pardoned. It was as though his past had never been. He was literally looked upon as a new person, entering into a new life. He now took on the heritage and family reputation of his new father. His "past" became the honor and glory attained by his new father to that date. No wonder Paul uses this to illustrate what has happened to the believer!

J. B. Phillips' translation of **2 Corinthians 5:17** brings home the amazing truth of what has taken place in our lives:

"For if a man is in Christ he becomes a new person altogether – the past is finished and gone, everything has become fresh and new."

Read Colossians 1:13

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21

The Christian life is an exchanged life. Jesus Christ took our life – all our past and

all that we were – and *became us* upon the Cross. Then, through the Resurrection and the giving of his Spirit, we have taken his life – all that he was and is – as our new heritage! Paul wonderfully describes it in **Galatians 2:20**:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

God looks at your past now and sees the righteous life of Jesus. He looks at your life now and sees the new creation that you have been made in Christ. This is the nature of your adoption in Christ!

A change of status

Whereas before he had been a slave (probably a captive from a foreign land), the adopted son now, by law, became a fully-fledged citizen of Rome and could enjoy all the special rights that citizenship gave. Adopted into God’s family, we too have become citizens of heaven! As **Ephesians 2:19** says:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household.”

But the slave’s status was now also changed at home. The adopted son received the father’s signet ring, engraved with the family seal. With it he received the full authority of his father (**Genesis 41:41-44; Esther 3:10-13; 8:2,8; Luke 15:22**). This ring acted like a “power-of-attorney” and with it the son could authorize any official document in the name of his father. It gave him tremendous power. We, too, as adopted sons, have received the Father’s signet ring – the name of Jesus. As the Lord Jesus himself told us **John 14:14**:

“And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.”

The adopted son was the legal and rightful heir of his new father. All that belonged to the father now became his as well. In Christ, we too have experienced this private adoption (**8:15**). Imagine! We are heirs of the living God! (**8:17**).

Heirs of God!

“If children – then heirs!” This is the logical progression. One is the result of the other. Paul echoes **Romans 8:17** in **Galatians 4:7**:

“So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.”

Being a child has to do with my nature and relationship; but being an heir has to do with my position and privileges. And, wonder of wonders, Paul goes on to reveal the glorious dimension of our inheritance. We are heirs of God!

The greatness of a father’s wealth determines the greatness of his heir’s wealth. And so Paul is emphasizing the wonder of our new relationship. We are heirs –

but not just heirs of anybody. We are heirs of God himself – the possessor of heaven and earth! (**Genesis 14:19**).

Now if that sounds overwhelming, Paul goes even further. My natural father may be very rich but, if he has many children and decided to equally make all his children his heirs, by the time it was all divided up between us there may not be too much left for me. So Paul reveals that, as God’s children, we are not only heirs of God – we are also *co-heirs* with Christ! The word translated “co-heir” (NIV) and “joint-heir” (KJV) literally means “one who is an heir along with another.” In other words, we inherit what Christ inherits! It is not divided up amongst the millions who have become God’s children. Each of us inherit all that Christ has!

If this is true – if I am really a “joint-heir” with Christ – then the natural question is: What then is Christ’s inheritance? **Colossians 1:16** gives us an indication:

“For by him (Jesus) all things are created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.”

Read Hebrews 1:2

Read Ephesians 1:10-11

An heir is one who inherits four things:

Possessions

These are all the wonderful blessings of our inheritance given for us to enjoy. When we step into Christ, we step into every spiritual blessing there is in heaven! (**Ephesians 1:3**). We are not waiting to possess these – they are ours already, simply because we are in Christ.

Read 2 Peter 1:3-4

The Scripture is full of “great and precious promises” that God has given to his children. These promises are the key to our inheritance in Christ. Here is just a glimpse of our inheritance:

- Provision (**Luke 12:22-31; Psalm 92:12-14; 104:14-24; 132:15; Ecclesiastes 5:19; Philippians 4:19**)
- Health (**Psalm 103:2-5; 3 John 2**)
- Grace (**2 Corinthians 3:5; 9:8**)
- Strength (**Philippians 4:13; Colossians 1:11-12; Psalm 28:8; 29:11; 37:6, 17,24,39; 68:28,35; Isaiah 40:11,29,31**)
- Encouragement (**Psalm 31:24; Isaiah 41:10-18**)
- Everything good (**Psalm 84:11; 68:6-19; James 1:17**)
- Support (**Psalm 66:9; 37:6,17,24,39; Jude 24**)
- Refuge, protection (**Isaiah 25:4; Deuteronomy 33:25,27; Psalm 91:11; Genesis 49:24; Job 23:6**)

- Deliverance (**Psalm 18:1-2,28,32,35-36**)
- Victory (**Isaiah 54:17; Daniel 11:32; 2 Corinthians 10:4; 1 John 4:4**)
- Peace (**John 14:27; 16:33; Philippians 4:7**)
- Joy (**Nehemiah 8:10; Psalm 132:16**)

Faith in God's Word takes them from promise form and puts them into tangible reality now.

Read Hebrews 11:1

Position

An heir not only inherits possessions, but also rank. As God's children, we have received a position of authority and power in his kingdom. **Ephesians 1:21-22** says that God "raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms." In that position, he is "far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come." But then **Ephesians 2:6** tells us: "And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus"! In other words, in Christ we have the same position of power and authority! He is there *by right*; we are there *by grace* (**1 Peter 3:21-22; 1 Corinthians 6:2-3**).

Privilege

Whereas our *position* as heirs has to do with our status towards the rest of God's creation, our *privilege* as heirs has to do with the Father's attitude toward us. Peter proclaims that we are now God's "chosen generation", his "royal priesthood", his "holy nation", his "peculiar people" (**1 Peter 2:9**, KJV & Phillips).

Responsibility

As heirs we also receive responsibility. We are now involved in our Father's "business." As Paul says in his letters to the Christians in Corinth: "We are God's fellow-workers" (**1 Corinthians 3:9**) and "Christ's ambassadors" (**2 Corinthians 5:18-20**). Our Father has given us the keys to his kingdom (**Matthew 16:19**). These speak not only of power and authority and privilege, but also of tremendous responsibility!

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples in **John 20:21**: "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." We must now say, as Jesus did in **Luke 2:49** (KJV):

"I must be about my Father's business!"