

“The Witness of the Spirit”
Romans 8:16
(Preached at Trinity, March 1, 2009)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Last time we began looking another of the axioms of Christianity. In **Verses 14-15** we find that those who belong to Christ and are led by the Holy Spirit are the sons of God. **Romans 8:14** – “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”
2. Christians have been adopted as the children of God.
3. In **Galatians 4** Paul tells us that because we are sons God has sent forth His Holy Spirit of adoption which enables us to cry out Abba, Father.
Galatians 4:6 – “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”
4. Paul repeats this in **Verse 15** - we have received the Holy Spirit of adoption. We are the sons of God.
There are glorious privileges of such a relationship with God.
 - A. We have entered a new relationship. We can call God Father. He looks upon us as His children. We have entered into a new family, the household of faith. We have a unique relationship with God and with other believers.
 - B. We have continual access to God through prayer.
 - C. We are heirs and joint-heirs with Christ.
 - D. We have Divine protection. Nothing shall harm us that God has not allowed. Nothing shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God. His love for us is infinite, unfathomable, and incomprehensible.
1 John 3:1 – “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God”
5. The most important thing a person can ask himself or herself is, “Am I one of God's children?” Not everyone can claim this distinction. There is no such thing as the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.
The statement, “We are all God's children” is not true. All men are not God's children.
Jesus speaking to the Pharisees:
John 8:42 – “Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me.”
John 8:44 – “Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”
Are you a child of God? How can you know?
The Bible presses us to examine ourselves.
2 Peter 1:10 – “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”
2 Corinthians 13:5 – “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?”

- NAS 2 Corinthians 13:5** – “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you-- unless indeed you fail the test?”
6. Most people just presume that God is their Father. They have great assurance that this is true. But many people confuse assurance with presumption
 - A. Presumption is usually based upon feelings. We think we are in God’s favor and so we must be. Most people have great confidence that they are on their way to heaven.
 - B. Presumption is based upon blind ignorance
 1. God Himself has provided certain tests – we are foolish if we do not avail ourselves of them
 2. We need great discernment
 - C. Presumption is deadly. Multitudes will stand before God shocked and condemned. So how can we know?
 7. Paul addresses this in **Verse 16**
Romans 8:16 – “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:”
 8. What Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit? It must be referring to the previous verse – the Holy Spirit of adoption – which takes us back to **Verse 14 and Verse 9**
The Holy Spirit is bearing witness with our spirit.
By our spirit, we are talking about that aspect of our being that is immortal; that aspect that enables us to interact with God. We are spiritual beings. This is what divides us from the animals. We are more than flesh and blood.
 9. Paul says one way the Christian knows he’s a child of God is by the witness of the Holy Spirit.
 - A. There is some ambiguity in the grammar here. Is Paul saying the Holy Spirit bears witness “with” our spirit or “to” our spirit? Grammatically it could be either.
 - B. You could say that the Holy Spirit bearing witness “with” our spirit as if our spirit is testifying that we are children of God and the Holy Spirit is bearing witness with or along side our spirit in agreement.
 - C. It would seem more consistent with the text that it is because of the Holy Spirit’s witness that we have our confidence.
The Holy Spirit bearing witness “to” our spirit or “with” our spirit in the sense, “I am talking with you.”
 - D. Our salvation was made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit
It was by the Holy Spirit that we were able to confess Christ
1 Corinthians 12:3 – “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.”
 1. The Holy Spirit is the agent regeneration
 2. He convicted us of sin and granted to us faith and repentance.
 3. If you have trusted Christ it was by the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that produced within you the conviction of sin and the terror of God’s judgment.
 - E. Paul is saying here that it is the Holy Spirit that gives us the affirmation that we are the children of God thus enabling us to cry, ABBA Father.
This verse is speaking of the essence of our assurance.
 10. But what does this mean that the Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit? There is a subjective and an objective aspect to this.

- I. Let's look at the subjective first – this is the most difficult and dangerous aspect to unfold
 A. The subjective is what we know in our hearts to be true

1. It is an inner witness
1 John 5:10 – “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”
2. Just how the Holy Spirit bears witness Paul doesn't say. The working of the Holy Spirit in many ways remains a mystery.
 Charles Hodge: “How the Spirit bears witness in our spirits the assurance that we are the children of God we cannot fully understand, any more than we can understand the mode in which he produces any other affect upon the mind.”

We can glean from several things we do know:

3. The Holy Spirit exerts His influence upon the regenerate mind
 - a. The believer has an awakened conscience that is convicted of sin – this is wrought by the Holy Spirit
 - b. John spoke of this renewed conscience
1 John 3:18-21 – “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth. ¹⁹ And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. ²⁰ For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. ²¹ Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, *then* have we confidence toward God.”
4. The Holy Spirit impresses upon us an overwhelming impression of the presence of God and an overwhelming confidence that we are the children of God.
Leon Morris – “Unaided, we cannot testify to the reality of our standing before God. But we are not unaided; the Spirit of God testifies to our spirit and gives us the assurance of our membership in the heavenly family. There is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit on our spirit.”
1689 Confession – “This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion grounded upon a fallible hope, but an infallible assurance of faith founded . . . on the testimony of the Spirit of adoption, witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God; and, as a fruit thereof, keeping the heart both humble and holy.”
4. The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with a comfort and peace
para, klhsij – The Holy Spirit is our Paraclete
John 14:16 – “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;”
John 14:26 – “But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”
Acts 9:31 – “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

- B. There is great danger here because all men can claim that their feelings are as legitimate as anyone else's.
Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”
1. Christianity is not merely an experience and
 ***no religious experience is ever necessarily valid in itself. It must be accompanied by other Biblical proofs.
 2. Experiences can be counterfeit. Feelings can be produced artificially. There are churches that place a great emphasis on experience. Satan's counterfeits can be very convincing.
2 Cor. 11:13-14 – “For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.”
 3. This is not to say, however, that the Holy Spirit doesn't work in the heart of the believer confirming and enriching his relationship with Christ.

II. Second, there is the Objective aspect of this witness of the Holy Spirit.

- A. The teachings of Scripture confirm the reality of what we see in our life
1. In other words, we examine our life in the light of Scripture
 2. Pink – “A Scriptural assurance of salvation is that knowledge which the Holy Spirit imparts to the heart through the Scriptures, that my “faith” is not a natural one, but “the faith of God's elect.”
- B. The Holy Spirit enlightens our minds with a knowledge of the Word that the unbeliever doesn't have.
1. The Christian has spiritual understanding
1 Corinthians 2:9-10 – “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. ¹⁰ But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”
 2. The lost man is void of spiritual understanding. The child of God has the ability to understand God's Word as the Holy Spirit illuminates our minds.
Matthew 13:10-13 – “And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? ¹¹ He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. ¹² For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. ¹³ Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand.”
 3. Jesus gave us His Spirit that we might be taught of Him
John 14:26 – “But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”

John 15:26 – “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, *even* the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me:”

(Literally: “He will bear witness of me”)

4. Does this bring you comfort? Do you have an understanding of God’s Word? Does it not witness to you that you are a child of God?

C. The Holy Spirit works in us the fruit of holiness.

1. This is His glorious testimony to us that we are the children of God
1 John 2:3 – “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.”
2. Thomas Brooks – “The more the soul is conformed to Christ, the more confident it will be of its interest in Christ.”
3. Are you growing in holiness? This is a witness that you are a child of God. Your disposition towards obedience, your great desire to honor God is wrought by the Holy Spirit and testifies that you are a child of God.

D. The Holy Spirit imparts to us the graces particular to God’s children

1. Paul designated these as the “fruit of the Spirit” **Galatians 5:22-23**
2. The wonderful gift of love has been shed abroad in our hearts.
Romans 5:5 – “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”
 - a. The testimony of God’s love in us affirms that we are children of God
1 John 3:1 – “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:”
 - b. Jesus taught that this love would mark us.
John 13:35 – “By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”
3. We have the grace of mercy and forgiveness which marks us
Matthew 6:14-15 – “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: ¹⁵ But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”
Matthew 6:12 – “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”

E. The Holy Spirit works within us the grace of perseverance

Philippians 1:6 – “Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ:”

1. Genuine conversion presses on
2. Our perseverance give us confidence that we are His
2 Timothy 4:7-8 – “I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

Conclusion:

1. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God, but His clearest testimony comes through the Word of God.
2. Our life testifies to what we are.
Romans 8:13 – “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.”
For those who seek to satisfy and gratify the flesh they will face eternal death – the ruination of the soul.
For those who seek to put to death the lusts of the flesh through the Holy Spirit they will find eternal life.
3. With all of these objective witnesses affirmed by the Holy Spirit in our heart there is still the subjective experience within us affirming that we are God’s children. There is the stirring within us to prayer, to seeking Christ. All of this affirms that we are the children of God. The Holy Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance.
4. Do you have this assurance – this assurance where you know in your heart that you are a believer? But is your inward experience affirmed by the outward testimony of the Word of God?