

The Breath of God | *Keeping In Step with the Life-giving Spirit*

Romans 8.14-18; Galatians 3.26-4.7

"The Spirit of Sonship" (#9)

6.16.13

Romans For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. ¹⁵ 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!" ¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. ²⁷ For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ 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. ²⁹ And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. ^{4.1} 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, ² but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. ³ So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, ⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons ⁶ Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" ⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. ⁸ 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?

This is *the LAST* in a series of sermons started right after Easter in which we've been looking at the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, *"the Lord and Giver of Life who proceeds from the Father and the Son and who with the Father and Son together is to be worshiped and glorified"* (Nicene Creed).

Today in this concluding sermon (even though, the next series will remind us of the Spirit too in this season of the Spirit) but in THIS sermon we confront a difficulty facing us in the spiritual life AND we may not know what to call this difficulty so this passage gives us some very helpful "spiritual vocabulary" (and, I might add, also our relational vocabulary)... So, NOW, when you see it in yourself you'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" (R 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 (the central teaching of Christianity) replaces this slave-mentality with a new basis for living and relating and we'll end with some ideas for putting it to work.

So, #1 – The DIFFICULTY (the slave 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 been members (in some way) of either Pagan temples or Jewish synagogues BEFORE becoming Christians...and therefore...they "know how this religion thing works"; they know the ground rules (or "elementary principles"; Gal. 4.3) the basic ways we get around here on planet earth. Like the unspoken rule that in this congregation, the important people will be treated a little better. And the basic rule that "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" – BTW if you're hearing a bunch of clichés it's because a society's clichés and aphorisms 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...rules which YOU religious people ASSUME will apply in the Society of Jesus – 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 these obsolete principles. The Gospel Community is the UN-RELIGION. Here, the ways you used to use to identify yourself, the descriptors 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 detrimental of your status – THEY DO NOT DEFINE YOU in the way they used to.

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 motive or "*spirit of slavery*" is inspiring a person's actions?

Well, let's think of a couple well-known 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 and 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 and protests – he won't go into the party. He tells his father, "All these years I've been serving you... I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that 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 an unmistakable tone of self-pity. He seems to be serving for what he can GET not because of WHO he is ...a son ...an heir ...beloved.

Then there's Jonah... the OT 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 as he runs away. 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 and a forced obedience that isn't concerned with the heart and purpose of God – only compliant to avoid punishment. Moved only by fear; an apparently obedient life that's actually only self-protective, self-promoting, selfish. It's calculated goodness. It's forced compliance that's always "looking' 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." *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". And this makes all the difference. How did it happen?

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

He comes identifying with us. God is 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 naturally 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 my penalty. He dies under the sentence of justice that I deserved...that HE might redeem those who were under the Law.

And then He gives away 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 always prayed, NOT "Papa" but simply, "My God! My God!" and in that He is giving away 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 and 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 give away His status and make sonship available to slaves and rebels... NOW the Father sends the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life and He communicates this adoption to us...He 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!" There's intimacy instead of fear – Abba.

And out of that intimacy, out of that sense of inclusion and belonging comes an obedience that is free – not calculated or self-protective. There's trust instead of cowering – "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 His, to be like my older brother, Jesus Christ. I can trust Him to not only call me son but to remake me into the family likeness. That’s a very different motive of obedience than the slave mentality.

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 sustains every person and that every person owes his/her existence to God...in some sense we are 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 eternally begotten Son). It’s by adoption.

Now YOUR question may be, “Well, how do I know if I AM ADOPTED into the family of God, 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...*”

The passage today 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 and the lawbreaker you are and see Jesus Christ –living for you and dying 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!” And that word 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 HOLY, HOLY, HOLY God who, because of Jesus Christ is no longer angry with you but WHO COUNTS YOU HIS OWN INFINITELY LOVED CHILD. That will begin to be the automatic response of your heart as you seek to obey, as you face temptation or trouble. Jesus Christ gives you the right to CRY “Abba” because He lost the right when He was on the Cross.

This is what it means to be led by the Spirit of God – you more and more become 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 ...we believe it.

Second, there is 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" – slave mentality. Fear. Calculated obedience. Your fears will alert you to this slave mentality coming back.

And ...weirdly ...there's something very attractive about it. The children of Israel wanted to go back into slavery in Egypt ...weird. And we have to become skilled at understanding this attraction. Paul was sort of baffled by it. BUT WE DO IT.

But it's more comfortable to live by sight...to simply depend on ourselves instead of depending on our Father. 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!"

A son is in relationship with the Father – learning to love the Father's heart and know His purposes... and those purposes include our becoming like Jesus Christ... even suffering with Him... so, we cry out... we scream, "Abba! Papa! Help ...you're MY one hope!" We have to practice this new identity and look for it to be more important than anything else that could be said about us!