

# Romans 8:14-15 Commentary

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Chart from recommended resource [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#) - used by permission  
[Romans Overview Chart](#) - Charles Swindoll

## ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS

Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans 3:21-5:21	Romans 6:1-8:39	Romans 9:1-11:36	Romans 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
Modified from Irving L. Jensen's chart above				

- R **Ruin** (Romans 1:17 – 3:20) – The utter sinfulness of humanity  
O **Offer** (Romans 3:21-31) – God's offer of justification by grace  
M **Model** (Romans 4:1-25) – Abraham as a model for saving faith  
A **Access** (Romans 5:1-11) – The benefits of justification  
N **New Adam** (Romans 5:12-21) – We are children of two "Adams"  
S **Struggle w/ Sin** (Romans 6:1-8:39) Struggle, sanctification, and victory

**Romans 8:14** For **all who** are being **led** by the **Spirit** of **God**, **these** are **sons** of **God**. (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** [hosoi gar pneumatī theou agontai](#). (3PPPI) [houtoi huiōi theou eisin](#). (3PPAI)

**Amplified:** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**NLT:** For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** All who follow the leading of God's Spirit are God's own sons. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** For as many as are being constantly led by God's Spirit, these are sons of God. ([Eerdmans Publishing](#) - used [by permission](#))

**Young's Literal:** for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God;

**FOR ALL WHO ARE (continuously) BEING LED BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD: osoi gar pneumatī theou agontai (3PPPI);**

- Ro 8:5,9; Ps 143:10; Pr 8:20; Isa 48:16,17; Gal 4:6; 5:16,18,22, 23, 24, 25; Eph 5:9
- Romans 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**SPIRIT LEADING  
EVIDENCE OF SONSHIP**

## Are you a child of the living God? This verse provides a good "sounding board" to address that query.

**For** (gar) (NIV has "because") Notice the little preposition "for" (there are over 7000 "for's" in Scripture) and if the **context** indicates, as it does in this passage, that the "for" is a **term of explanation**, pause and ask yourself what is the Spirit seeking to explain? **In fact, stop reading right now and observe Ro 8:14 and see if you can determine what Paul is explaining.** Notice how pausing to ponder will always force you to examine the **context**. You can (and should) practice this simple discipline every time you encounter a for, and while not every instance is a term of explanation, a "for" at the beginning of a verse is almost always is used with that grammatical sense. **I guarantee that if you begin to "pause and ponder," you will radically rejuvenate your "Read Through the Bible in a Year" program!** You might even get a small journal and begin to keep notes on what the Spirit illuminates and how this truth can be applied to your daily life. As you practice **interrogating the text (for, therefore, but, so that, etc) with 5W/H** questions such as "What's the for explaining?", you will begin to learn to (1) **Read the Bible inductively** (power point overview) and to (2) **Meditate** (see also **Primer on Biblical Meditation**) on the Scripture. Meditation or "chewing the cud" of the Scripture (cf Mt 4:4, Job 23:12-note, Jer 15:16) so to speak is a vanishing discipline in our fast paced, hi tech, low touch society, but a spiritual discipline which God promises to greatly bless (See Ps 1:1-note, Ps 1:2-note, Ps 1:3-note, Joshua 1:8-note, cf Ps 4:4, 19:14, 27:4, 49:4, 63:6, Ps 77:6, 77:12, Ps 104:34, Ps 119:15, 119:23, 119:27, Ps 119:48, 119:78, Ps 119:97, 119:99, Ps 119:148, 143:5, Ps 145:5) From the preceding passages which "organ" of our being is most often involved/engaged in meditation? What are the subjects or the focus of meditation? **Reading the Bible without meditating on it is like eating without chewing.** We must read...

Scripture every day  
And meditate on what God said  
To fight temptation from the world  
And live a life that's Spirit led  
(see note) --Sper

Earlier **Paul** also taught that "those who are according to the flesh set their minds (present tense = this is their lifestyle) on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit... 9 However, you are not **in the flesh** (still unregenerate) but **in the Spirit**, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. (Ro 8:5-note, Ro 8:9-note) (See also 1Jn 3:1-notes, 1Jn 3:2-notes)

**For** is a **term of explanation** - When we observe the context, we note Paul's statement "if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live." (Ro 8:13). Then Paul uses "**for**" to explain why you will live. In short, those who kill sin are showing that they are being led by the Spirit and this marks them as true (not counterfeit) "sons of God." Stated another way, the Spirit's leading energizes sin's killing. A counterfeit "son" would not even have a desire to "kill sin" much less have the power (of the Spirit) to accomplish this supernatural task!

**John Piper** explains it this way "remember I said at one point **by the Spirit** does not mean that the Spirit is a tool or a weapon that we wield. The Spirit is Person. We are in His hands, not He in ours! So killing sin **by the Spirit** means having a mindset through which the Holy Spirit works to free us from the power of sin. And that mindset is the mindset of faith in the blood-bought promises of God (**Ed**: See **paragraph below** for the link to a more complete explanation of how this killing of sin by the Spirit is effected). Now to confirm that we were on the right track when we said, the Spirit is not an instrument in our hands but we are an instrument in His hands, consider what Paul says in Ro 8:14. He says, "**For** all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." The "**for**" means that he is giving the basis and explanation for verse 13. So "put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit" in verse 13 is **explained by** "led by the Spirit" in verse 14, and "you will live" in verse 13 is **explained by** "you are the sons of God" in verse 14. Ponder those two pairs with me for a moment. "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) **Because** all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." Paul restates "putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit" with the words, "you are led by the Spirit." So here is our confirmation that we were on the right track last week: Doing something **by the Spirit** means being "led" to do it by the Spirit. He is not an instrument in our hands. We are an instrument in His hands. We are not leading Him. He is leading us. He is not a mere responder to us. We are being moved and led by Him. So then what is it to be led by the Spirit in verse 14 in view of its relation to verse 13? It is to be moved by the Spirit to kill sin by trusting in the superior worth of our Father's love. **When you fight sin by trusting in Christ as superior to what sin offers, you are being led by the Spirit.** Don't take this verse out of its context and make it mean mainly, "If I am led to the right college I am a child of God." Or: "If I am led to the right spouse, I am a child of God." Or: "If I am led to the right job, I am a child of God." **There is a sense in which the children of God will lean on the Spirit for guidance in all those areas. But that is not the focus of this text.** This text says, **Kill sin by the Spirit**, because "all who are [THUS] led by the Spirit are the sons of God." In other words, the evidence that we are the children of God is that the Holy Spirit confirms His presence by leading us into war with our sin. The children of God hate sin. The children of God have the values and priorities and preferences and tastes of their Father. They are chips off the old block, as it were. And the reason they share these traits of God their Father is because they have His Spirit Who leads them this way. He gives them the new tastes and new preferences and the new values and the new pleasures and the new sadness. **And so the evidence of our sonship is:**

Do we fight sin in our lives, or do we feel blasé about sin in our lives? ([The Spirit-Led Are the Sons of God](#))

**Watch (you MUST watch the video - Piper uses a technique to mark the Scripture which adds to the teaching value of HOW we BY THE SPIRIT kill sin!)** - How can we kill sin by the Spirit? Piper answers that question - at about 30 minutes into the video entitled [Groaning Creation, Groaning Saints, Groaning Spirit - Desiring God](#). Specifically Dr Piper discusses the application the following passages - Ephesians 6:17 ("Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God"), Galatians 3:5 ("hearing with faith"), 2Thessalonians 2:13 ("through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth" - on "sanctification" compare Heb 12:14) Then Dr Piper illustrates how Ro 8:13 "works" in Hebrews 13:5-6.

**Douglas Moo** agrees with Piper writing "In popular speech, Christians often use language such as "led by the Spirit" to refer to guidance: "I was led by the Spirit to witness to her." But this is probably not what Paul means here. (The NIV Application Commentary)

**Cranfield** - The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led, directed, impelled, controlled by the Spirit.

**William MacDonald** writes that Romans 8:13 "describes what is characteristically true of genuine believers. By the enablement of the Holy Spirit they put to death the deeds of the body. They enjoy eternal life now, and will enter into life in its fullness when they leave this earth."

**Dr Wayne Grudem** also draws attention to the use of **for** writing that "The privilege of being led by the Holy Spirit is also a benefit of adoption. Paul indicates that this is a moral benefit whereby the Holy Spirit puts in us desires to obey God and live according to His will. He says, **"All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"** (Ro 8:14), and he gives this as the reason Christians should **"put to death the deeds of the body"** by means of the Holy Spirit working within them (Ro 8:13-note; note **"FOR"** at the beginning of Ro 8:14). He sees the Holy Spirit as leading and guiding God's children in paths of obedience to God. (Systematic theology)

**Leon Morris** says that **for** or **"Because"** (as it is rendered in the NIV) carries on the logical sequence; it introduces the basis for saying, "you will live".

**Being led** ([0071](#))(**ago**) means to "to direct the movement of an object from one position to another" (BDAG) and here is used in the **present tense** which signifies continuously and the **passive voice** underscores the fact that the leading is the result of a force, power or source extrinsic to ourselves, i.e., the Holy Spirit. So what is the believer's role? We need to be willing to be led by the Holy Spirit. This calls for a Christ-like attitude of "not my will be done but thine," a prayerful attitude of God's "will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt 6:10) (That's easy to pray isn't it, but it's another thing to live it out in real life!) In short Spirit leading calls for self submitting! How are you doing beloved? Remember, the very fact that you are yielding to the Spirit's leading (even imperfectly as is probably true of most of us - remember that the present tense here is a call to walk in a general direction [heavenward] and not a call to perfection!).

Those who are being **led by the Spirit** are those who Paul has previously described as being in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1), walking according to the Spirit (Ro 8:4), being Spirit-indwelt (Ro 8:9, 11), and putting to death the deeds of the body (Ro 8:13).

**John Stott** comments on the use of the verb **ago** here writing "Dr Lloyd-Jones rightly enters a theological caveat at this point, relating to the nature and operation of the Holy Spirit. 'There is no violence in Christianity ...', he writes. **'What the Spirit does is to enlighten and persuade.'** Because he is a gentle, sensitive Spirit, he can easily be 'grieved'. **'The Holy Spirit never browbeats us ... The impulse can be very strong, but there is no "driving", there is no compulsion.'** (The Message of Romans: God's good news for the world) (**Ed:** While I would tremble to disagree with men of the stature of Stott and Lloyd-Jones [a fellow medical doctor like myself] Mark 1:12 does record that "the Spirit impelled" Jesus to go out into the wilderness." which is ekballo the same term used of our Lord's expulsion of demons in Mk 1:34, 39! Interesting!)

**Spurgeon - Leading** implies **following**; and those who are enabled to follow the guidance of the Divine Spirit are most assuredly children of God (1Jn 3:1-note), for the Lord ever leads His own children (Gal 5:18-note where **led** is in the present passive). **If, then, you are following the lead of God's Spirit, you have one of the evidences of sonship...** "It does not say, 'As many as are driven by the Spirit of God.' No, the devil is a driver, and when he enters either into men or into hogs he drives them furiously. Remember how the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea (Mt 8:31-32). Whenever you see a man fanatical and wild, whatever spirit is in him it is not the Spirit of Christ."

**Guzik** - He didn't say, "As many as read their Bibles, these are the sons of God." He didn't say, "As many as are patriotic Americans, these are the sons of God." He didn't say, "As many as take communion, these are the sons of God." In this text, the **test for sonship** is whether or not a person is led by the Spirit of God... Where does the Holy Spirit lead us? · He leads us to repentance · He leads us to think little of self and much of Jesus · He leads us into truth · He leads us into love · He leads us into holiness · He

leads us into usefulness." ([Romans 8 - David Guzik Commentary on the Bible](#))

The relation of the **Spirit** to the **sons of God** is presented as being much like that of a shepherd to his sheep. They are **being led**" by Him as their Guide and Comforter (Jn 14:16KJV, Jn 14:26KJV, Jn 15:26KJV, Jn 16:7KJV) and Protector (cp Ps 84:11 [Our shield = Our Protector]-[see Spurgeon's blessed note](#)). In Galatians 3:24 Paul says the law has a responsibility to "lead" men to Christ. Once the law achieves its objective, it passes the guiding role to the Holy Spirit, Who guides us daily into the truth (Jn 16:13, cp 1Jn 2:20, 27, 1Co 2:12, 13, 15, 16) as we daily yield to His gracious leading (Gal 5:18-note). Paul rebuked his readers in the letter to the Galatians asking...

You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? **Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?** Did you suffer so many things in vain-- if indeed it was in vain? Does He then, who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (Gal 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5)

In contrast to our prior harsh taskmaster **Sin**, which both subtly seduces and then deceitfully drives as one drives a slave, the Holy Spirit relies on the gentle persuasion of a "still small voice" (cp 1K 19:12KJV) rather than force, and even gives believers the "*want to*" or desire to follow Him! (see Php 2:13NLT-note). Paul goes to great length to emphasize that the Holy Spirit's leadership does not involve a new bondage which is simply an improved version of the works based bondage to the law, sin and Satan, a bondage in which fear dominated our life rather than faith (and obedience motivated by love) (cp Heb 2:14, 15-note).

The result of this **being led** is that the Holy Spirit is progressively sanctifying us as God's elect, setting us apart (the essence of the word "holy" - see **hagios**) more and more (cp 2Co 3:18) from the world and more and more unto God for His purposes (as "vessels of honor" 2Ti 2:21-note) and His glory (2Th 2:13, 1Pe 1:2-note, cp 1Th 5:23-note). There is the initial setting apart (justification = past tense salvation) (Acts 20:32, 26:18 Heb 10:10-note) and then the progressive continuous process of setting apart (sanctification as a process = present tense salvation) (Heb 10:14-note) (See also the **Three Tenses of Salvation**)

**Martin Luther** alluded to the leading of the Spirit when he declared "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him."

It is the Holy Spirit who awakens within us the first faint longings for God and goodness. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and leads us to the Cross where that sin is forgiven. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be freed from the sins which have us in their grip (Ro 8:13-note) and to gain the virtues which are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-note, Gal 5:23-note). It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven (Ro 8:16-note) and that Jesus Christ is Lord (1Co 12:3). Indeed, are not the inception (justification), the process (sanctification) and the consummation (glorification) of our Christian lives all the work of the blessed Holy Spirit!

**Ray Pritchard** - To be "led" by the Spirit is a very personal term. It means to be led by the hand, to be personally escorted by a tour guide. The Holy Spirit takes your hand and leads you through the difficulties of life. So many Christians have said, "If it had not been for the Lord, I wouldn't have made it." But we don't know the half of it. When you are perplexed, you have the right to say, "Holy Spirit, please show me what to do." "Holy Spirit, I am confused. I don't know which way to go. I'm counting on you to lead me." He will do it. Thank God for the leading of the Holy Spirit. ([Life in the Spirit](#))

**Newell** - "There is deep mystery, no doubt, in the great double fact of [sic] God is working in us to will, and on the other hand, of our choosing His will, moment by moment. We can only affirm that both are taught in Scripture

**Newell** - Let us look first at the words "sons of God"; and second at what is meant by being "led by the Spirit"; third, let us see that our being thus in the Spirit's sphere and control is the proof of the reality of our sonship.

1. "Sons" means "adult-sons," sons come of age (see footnote, verse 15). The term, when referring to saints, is applied in Paul's epistles both to Christ (Rom. 1:3, 4, 9); and to those associated with Him since His resurrection (Gal. 4:4-7); therefore to His own saints, sealed by the Spirit—those sons whom God is "bringing unto glory."

2. Being "led by the Spirit" does not refer here to service, nor to "guidance" in particular paths. It refers to that general control by the blessed Spirit of those born of the Spirit, living by the Spirit, in the Spirit. He is the sphere and mode of their being, and is their seal unto the day of redemption.

3. That our being thus in the Spirit's sphere and control is the proof of the reality of our sonship, is evident from what has been said; but let us avoid the thought that assurance of our sonship is based on our perfect obedience to the Spirit. Nothing is based upon us. If one of God's true saints disobeys, it is the office of that same Spirit to convict him of his sin, interceding in Him "according to God" (Rom. 8:27), while Christ intercedes for him above (1 John 2:1). (Romans Verse by Verse)

**John MacArthur** warns that "Paul is not suggesting the **"Let go and let God"** philosophy that is promoted by groups and leaders

who advocate a so-called deeper life, in which one progressively rises to higher and higher levels of spirituality until sin and even temptation are virtually absent. That is not the kind of spiritual life Paul promises or that he personally experienced, as he testifies so movingly in Romans 7. As long as a believer is in his earthly body, he will be subject to the perils of the flesh and will need to keep putting its sins to death. Only in heaven will his need for practical sanctification end. Until then, all believers are admonished to put sin to death and to live in and for their new Sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Ro. 6:3–11). The Puritan John Owen warned that sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still (cf. Sin and Temptation [Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1983], p. xxi). Satan is likely to attack when a believer is most satisfied with his spiritual life. That is when pride, the chief of sins, easily sneaks into our lives unnoticed and lead us to believe that contentment with ourselves is contentment in God. ([MacArthur, J: Romans 1-8. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**MacArthur** adds "The first inner confirmation of adoption is the believer's being led by the Spirit of God. A person who is truly experiencing the leading hand of God at work in his life can be certain he is God's child.

It is important to note the tense Paul uses here. Are being led translates the present passive indicative of agō, indicating that which already exists. The phrase are being led does not, however, indicate uninterrupted leading by the Spirit. Otherwise the many New Testament admonitions and warnings to Christians would be meaningless. But the genuine believer's life is basically characterized by the Spirit's leading, just as it is basically characterized by Christ's righteousness.

A merely professing Christian does not and cannot be led by the Spirit of God. He may be moral, conscientious, generous, active in his church and other Christian organizations, and exhibit many other commendable traits. But the only accomplishments, religious or otherwise, he can make claim to are those of his own doing. His life may be outstandingly religious, but because he lives it in the power of the flesh, he can never be truly spiritual and he will never have the inner conviction of God's leading and empowering.

When someone confides in me that he has doubts about his salvation, I often respond by asking if he ever senses God's leading in his life. If he answers yes, I remind him of Paul's assurance in this verse: All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. (Ibid)

**Moule** writes that the phrase **led by the Spirit** "is exactly parallel to **“walk after the Spirit”** (Gal 5:16-note) The Galatian passage is enough to show that St Paul intends not enthusiastic exaltation, but heart-subjection to the pure rule of God's will, in thought, word, and work; a subjection on the one hand perfectly voluntary in man, on the other hand perfectly due to the Divine Agent and Teacher. ([The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans](#)) (In another note Moule says "As by their ruling principle. For illustration of the truth here referred to, see Jn 16:13, and Gal. 5:18, 22, 23. The phrase is exactly parallel to “walk after the Spirit.” The Galatian passage is enough to shew that St Paul intends not enthusiastic exaltation, but heart-subjection to the pure rule of God's will, in thought, word, and work; a subjection on the one hand perfectly voluntary in man, on the other hand perfectly due to the Divine Agent and Teacher.")

**Woodrow Kroll** - Some conclusions can be drawn both from how the word (LEAD) is used elsewhere and how it is used in Romans 8:14. First, it is obvious that to be led does not merely mean to be influenced. Jesus was not "influenced" as a sheep to the slaughter, nor was Paul "influenced" before King Agrippa. Led means to be moved by a force external to oneself. When we are led by the Spirit of God, it is not by suggestion but by exertion. Second, the leading of the Holy Spirit is not harsh but gentle. He is not repressive but kind, saying, "This is the way, walk in it" (Isa. 30:21). He does not lead as a tyrant but as a teacher (John 14:26). Third, the leading of the Spirit is not sporadic or haphazard but steady and sustained. The verb ago is in the third person present indicative form, which implies continuous action. Finally, the leading of the Holy Spirit is authenticating. By His constant, gentle leading, the Spirit assures us that we are indeed the children of God, born again into the line of the Second Adam and on our way to heaven. (Romans - Twenty-First Century Biblical Commentary)

**Thomas Constable** - Paul wrote to the Galatians that the law leads people to Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Holy Spirit does this too (John 16:8–11). Having come to Christ the Holy Spirit continues to lead us in the moral will of God. The Holy Spirit leads every true child of God (Gal. 5:18). He goes before us and expects us to follow Him as a shepherd does his sheep. However we can choose to follow or not to follow Him, to walk according to the Spirit or to walk according to the flesh (v. 13). The Spirit leads us objectively through the Scriptures and subjectively by His internal promptings (John 20:31; 1 John 3:24; 5:13; Rom 8:16; Gal. 4:6). (See Bernard Ramm, The Witness of the Spirit. Another view is that to be “led by the Spirit” here, and in Gal. 5:18, means that the Spirit determines the direction of one's life as a whole rather than that He guides us (e.g., Moo, p. 498).)

**Steven Cole** - If the Spirit is leading us to kill our sin, then we can be assured that we are children of God (8:14).

Romans 8:14: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." It is important to note the first word of that sentence: "For." Paul is explaining verse 13 and showing how it applies to the matter of assurance. In the context, he is not talking about how the Spirit may lead you to go to one college or another or to one career or another. Rather, Paul is saying that if the Holy Spirit is leading you to put to death the sinful deeds of the body (8:13), it is evidence that you are a child of God.

No one who is living according to the flesh kills his sin on the heart level. Some legalists or ascetics may



control their sin outwardly, so that they can look good to others (Gal. 6:12-13). But they are filled with pride about their performance. They don't kill their sin to glorify God, but to glorify self. But here Paul is saying that if the Spirit is leading you to kill your sin on the thought or heart level out of a desire to please and glorify the God who saved you, that is evidence that you are His child. To be led by the Spirit of God means to have the whole direction of your life determined by the Spirit, so that His fruit is growing in your life (Gal. 5:18-23).

Note that the verb is passive: "led by the Spirit of God." As Thomas Schreiner (Romans [Baker], p. 422) explains, this "suggests that the Spirit is the primary agent in Christian obedience, that it is his work in believers that accounts for their obedience. Although this does not exclude the need for believers to follow the Spirit, it emphasizes that any human obedience is the result of the Spirit's work." John Murray (The Epistle to the Romans [Eerdmans], p. 295) expresses the balance: "The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit's activity and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer's activity." This is the mystery that we saw in Ro 8:13, where by the Spirit we kill our sin. God gives the power but we must take action to obey.

So Paul's point in 8:14 is that if the Spirit of God is leading us to kill our sin, then we can be assured that we are "sons of God." Some commentators see significance in the fact that Paul changes from "sons" (8:14, 15) to "children" (8:16, 17), but I agree with the majority who say that there is no significant difference. But it is significant that this is the first time in Romans that Paul mentions this wonderful truth, that we are children of God. We have been born into God's family through the Spirit who imparts new life to us (8:2, 6, 10). And, we have been adopted into God's family as His chosen heirs (8:15, 17).

Charles Hodge (Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Eerdmans], p. 265) points out three implications of being "sons" of God: (1) There is similarity of disposition, character, or nature. After commanding us to love our enemies, Jesus explains (Matt. 5:45), "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." Sons reflect the character of their father because they share his nature. (2) "Sons" are the objects of special affection (Rom. 9:26; 2 Cor. 6:18). I love all children, but I have a special love for my own children. God has a special love for His chosen children (John 13:1; 14:21). (3) "Sons" have a title to some peculiar dignity or advantage. They are heirs of the riches of their father (Rom. 8:17). They have special access to his presence that others lack. If the President is greeting a crowd, the Secret Service will prevent unknown children from breaking through the barrier and running up to the President. But his own children can be right at his side.

We could probably come up with many more privileges that are ours because we are God's children. Paul's first point is that if we are killing our sin on a daily basis, that didn't come from us. It is an indication that the Spirit is leading and governing our lives. John Piper puts it ("The Spirit-Led Are the Sons of God," on DesiringGod.org), "When you fight sin by trusting in Christ as superior to what sin offers, you are being led by the Spirit." And that is a sign that we are sons and daughters of God. ([Sermon](#))

**Phil Newton** on how the Spirit leads...

The Greek translates, "As many as are being led (and continually led) by the Spirit of God, these ones are sons of God." The Spirit leads consistently rather than sporadically. He leads us to Christ and His sufficiency rather than depending on the law for righteousness. He leads us clearly in the path of divine revelation in Holy Scripture.

But is this idea of the Spirit's leadership not one of the easiest ways to excuse and defend our actions? Yes, you are right, so we must provide a few caveats. The Spirit does not contradict the Word. You can pray about something and "feel led" to take an action that the Scripture opposes but that is not the Spirit's leadership. You can follow your desires and wants, confusing them for the Spirit's leadership. You can be excited about something and certain that you "have heard from God," but it may not be the Spirit's leadership. Here are the basics for recognizing the Spirit's leadership.

**(1) He always leads you to glorify Jesus Christ**—not self, not an idea, not a project, not a ministry, not an ideology, not a theology, not an image. "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you" (John 16:14).

**(2) He always leads you to truth**—God's Word alone is truth. That is why He is called "the Spirit of truth," that is the Spirit who is characterized in every way by truth (John 14:17).

**(3) He always leads you in the way of understanding and applying Scripture**, never contrary to the eternal Word. "He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13; cf. 1 Cor. 2:6-10). So the Spirit's leadership strengthens obedience, faithfulness, and conformity to the image of Jesus Christ in all things. He leads you to love and depend upon the Word.

**(4) He always leads you to more and more dependence upon the Father** through the sufficiency of Jesus

Christ demonstrated by the Spirit as “the Spirit of adoption as sons” by which we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom. 8:15).

**Conclusion - Here are definite marks of the true believer:**

He has a new obligation to walk in the Spirit that spurs him on to conformity to Christ.

He knows the Spirit’s aid and impetus in putting to death the deeds of the body.

He is being led by the Spirit.

**Do these things ring true in your life?** ([Sermons from the Epistle to the Romans](#))

**William Newell** on “**led by the Spirit**” notes that “led by the Spirit” does not refer here to service, nor to “guidance” in particular paths (see Piper’s note above). It refers to that general control by the blessed Spirit of those born of the Spirit, living by the Spirit, in the Spirit. He is the sphere and mode of their being, and is their seal unto the day of redemption.

**Beet** writes that **led by the Spirit** refers to our “thoughts, words, actions, guided by Him. That He prompts and enables us to put to death the actions of the body, proves Him to be the Spirit of God. He leads us by opening our eyes to recognize sin and see its hurtfulness (**Ed**: And how much it grieves our Father’s heart and causes Him displeasure!), and by giving us moral strength to conquer it; by revealing the will of God and its excellence, and by giving us power to do it. (**Ed**: See this balance of our responsibility to accomplish the task but the Spirit’s provision of power to do so in Php 2:12-note and Php 2:13-note). ([Romans 8 Commentary](#))

**Ruth Paxson** - The only way to combat successfully the claims of the flesh is to obey implicitly every prompting or motion of the Spirit, be it ever so slight. Whether it be a warning, a check, a leading, or a teaching, all are given by Him as He sees necessary, and should be followed instantly.

**John MacArthur** - To be led by the Spirit is the same as walking by Him (vv. 16, 25) but carries additional emphasis on His leadership. We do not walk along with Him as an equal, but follow His leading as our sovereign, divine Guide. “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God,” Paul says (Rom. 8:14). The converse is also true: Those who are sons of God are led by the Spirit of God. Believers do not need to pray for the Spirit’s leading, because He is already doing that. (**ED**: WHILE I AGREE WITH THAT STATEMENT, IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT IN THE PSALMS WE REPEATEDLY SEE THE PHRASE “**LEAD ME**” - Ps. 5:8; Ps. 25:5; Ps. 27:11; Ps. 31:3; Ps. 43:3; Ps. 60:9; Ps. 61:2; Ps. 108:10; Ps. 139:10; Ps. 139:24; Ps. 143:10) They need to seek for willingness and obedience to follow His leading (**ED**: MY FLESH IS NOT WILLING - BUT THE SPIRIT GIVES US THE DESIRE AND POWER - Php 2:13NLT+). When Christ enters a person’s life, the Holy Spirit enters simultaneously (cf. Rom. 8:9). And the moment He enters He begins to lead God’s newborn child in the way of freedom (Gal. 5:1), holiness (5:16), truth (John 16:13–15), fruitfulness (Gal. 5:22–23), access to God in prayer (Eph. 2:18), assurance (Rom. 8:16), witnessing (Acts 1:8), and submissive joy (Eph. 5:18–21). No wonder Paul rejoiced that “what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3–4). (MNTC-Galatians)

**Hendricksen** writes that ultimately being **led by the Spirit**...

means **sanctification**. It is the constant, effective, and beneficent influence which the Holy Spirit exercises within the hearts and lives of God’s children, enabling them more and more to crush the power of indwelling sin and to walk in the way of God’s commandments freely and cheerfully.

The influence which the Holy Spirit exercises is:

**a. Not sporadic but constant.**

It is not being injected into the lives of God’s children now and then, in moments of great need or danger. On the contrary, it is steady, constant, as even the tense here in Rom. 8:14 implies. Believers are being led by the Spirit.

**b. It is not (at least not primarily) protective but corrective.**

In the entire context nothing is said about guarding God’s children from receiving physical harm, nothing about keeping them out of danger when traveling. On the other hand, the immediately preceding context refers to putting to death the disgraceful deeds of the body, doing this “by the Spirit.”

**c. It not merely directs but controls.**

To be led by the Spirit means more than to be guided by him, though, to be sure, the Spirit is also our Guide (John 16:13). Cf. Matt. 15:14; Luke 6:39; Acts 8:31. But the leadership provided by the Spirit amounts to more



than merely pointing out the right way. It reminds us not so much of the Indian guide who pointed out to the white explorers the pass through the Rockies, as of the people who led the blind man (of Jericho) to Jesus (Luke 18:40). Merely pointing out the way to him would not have helped him. When the Holy Spirit leads believers he becomes the controlling influence in their lives, bringing them at last to glory. (Ed: See John Piper's preceding caveat regarding this "genre" of interpretation.)

**d. On the other hand, it does not stifle or repress but helps and encourages.**

When the Holy Spirit leads God's child, the latter's responsibility and activity are not canceled or repressed.  
([New Testament Commentary- Romans- Chapters 1-16](#))

**Pulpit Commentary Homily** - Ver. 14.—The guidance of the Spirit. Moses displayed a beautiful absence of jealousy when he cried, "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them" His wish is realized under the Christian dispensation, where "the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." This gift is the fulfilment of Christ's promise that his disciples should not be left "orphans," and our investiture with his Spirit is a testimony to the efficacy of the work of Christ. The Spirit operates silently but powerfully on the heart; though unseen, his presence is most real. Science acquaints us with subtle forces that work on matter. Place a bar of steel in the magnetic meridian with the north end downward, and, if struck with a wooden mallet, the bar will be magnetized. No outward difference is perceptible, yet the particles have assumed a uniform direction, have acquired new properties. So does the Spirit impart a new tendency, a new nature, and the whole man is changed. The Spirit works not like the influences of our environment from without inwardly, but from within outwardly.

I. THE LEADING FOR WHICH THAT OF THE SPIRIT IS SUBSTITUTED. It is called "self," or "the flesh," where the inimical power of the great adversary is the chief factor. The aim of the life may not be clear to the man possessed. He may seem to have no definable object of pursuit; led on now by one impulse, now by another, its force and persistency varying in all degrees. Some rely on their own native wisdom for the steerage of their course, others are governed by the maxims and customs of the society in which they move. The "spirit of the age" is a prevalent controlling force. In proportion as any one goal is kept in view, and "reached forth to" perseveringly, is the man esteemed strong and successful. And the Christian is strong according to the heartiness and fidelity with which he surrenders himself to the guidance of the Spirit. He acknowledges that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

II. THE ROAD TRAVELLED UNDER THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT. It is a heaven-ward journey; the affections are "set on things above." It begins with taking up the cross to follow Christ, and implies self-denial in order to please God. It is a pilgrimage. This world is not our rest, or our final home. It involves a warfare, for many foes beset our path, and there is no turning aside to By-path Meadows for the man under the influence of the Spirit. How the natural life is glorified and transfigured by this conception of the unseen hand impelling us! No man is ever harmed by the Spirit's leading, and if he falls into a snare it is because he has mistaken the Divine indications of his route.

III. ASCERTAINING THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT. We are not led blindfold and irresistibly; the reason is illumined, the emotions are quickened. All that strengthens the spiritual life contributes to the clearness with which we recognize the Spirit's prompting, and to the readiness with which we yield to his gentlest touch. Prayer keeps open the communication with the spiritual realm. Ask for guidance before, not after, commencing an enterprise; nor expect the Holy Spirit to come in as a *deus ex machina* to rectify your errors. Compare your judgment and conduct with the precepts and principles of Scripture, and with the example of good men, especially of Jesus Christ. We are taught in his school. Like an artist intently studying some work of genius and imbibing its spirit, so meditate on Christ till you catch his enthusiasm for goodness and consecration to the will of God. Make the most of the seasons when you are blessedly conscious that you are "in the Spirit," be it on "the Lord's day" or any other. It is sin that darkens our spiritual perceptions, as some accident to the body may blunt the finer sensations, may dull the hearing and dim the sight.

IV. THE FAMILY LIKENESS WHICH THIS GUIDANCE IMPARTS. The Spirit of God enables us to realize our sonship. Hatred and disobedience and fear are exchanged for glad communion and willing service. We become increasingly like our Father, like our elder Brother Christ, and like the rest of the redeemed children. It is not identical sameness, but similarity, which results. Members of the same home may differ much in exact lineaments, yet the stranger can discern a family likeness. By his Spirit is the Saviour preparing his brethren for their heavenly home, to enter with intelligent zest into its enjoyments, the society of the angels and of the blest, into holier worship and higher service than we can render here.—S. R. A.

**John Trapp** - As great men suffer their sons to go along with them, but set tutors to overlook and order them; so dealeth God by his; the Spirit leadeth them into all goodness, righteousness, and truth, Eph 5:9, and fetcheth them again in their wanderings.

**Jon Courson** - Just as the Spirit of God gives you victory over the flesh, the Spirit of God will give you guidance in life. People struggle so hard with finding God's will, yet it's so simple. When asked how to find the will of God, Augustine simply said, "It's real simple. Love the Lord and do whatever you want." How could he say this? Because if we love the Lord, Psalm 37 says the Spirit will change the desires of our heart to conform to His will.

**Douglas Moo** - To be "**led by the Spirit**" probably means not to be guided by the Holy Spirit but, as in Gal. 5:18, to have the direction of one's life as a whole determined by the Spirit. The phrase is thus a way of summarizing the various descriptions of the

life of the Spirit that Paul has used in vv. 4–9. Paul may well want to include in this “being led” an “inner compulsion” and the involvement of the emotions, but the OT background and the parallel in Gal. 5:18 make it unlikely that the idea is specifically “ecstatic” or “charismatic.” The **active** “you put to death through the Spirit” of v. 13 is one aspect of the **passive** “being led by the Spirit,” pointing again to the inextricable relationship between indicative and imperative in Paul’s teaching about the Christian life. At the same time, we should not ignore another nuance in Paul’s language. The verb Paul uses here (Gk. *agō* - lead) also occurs in some OT passages that refer to God’s “leading” of the people of Israel through the wilderness (see esp. Dt. 8:5, 15; 29:4; 32:12). The presence in this context of other probable allusions to Israel’s wilderness journey to the promised land suggests that Paul might be alluding to this experience. As God led his “son” Israel (Ex 4:22) successfully through the trials of the wilderness to their “inheritance” (e.g., Ex 15:17), so now God leads his New Covenant “sons” through their trials (vv. 17, 18) to their inheritance (v. 17). (NICNT-Romans)

**John Murray** - The connection between this verse and the preceding is as follows. Those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body are led by the Spirit of God. But those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. And, if they are the sons of God, that status is the guarantee of eternal life. Verse 14 is, therefore, to be interpreted as providing the basis for the assurance given in verse 13, namely, “ye shall live”, the specific consideration being that eternal life is the invariable issue of sonship. It is taken for granted that those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body are led by the Spirit of God and it is categorically asserted that as many as are led by the Spirit these are the sons of God. **“Led by the Spirit”** implies that they are governed by the Spirit and the emphasis is placed upon the activity of the Spirit and the passivity of the subjects. “Put to death the deeds of the body” (vs. 13) emphasizes the activity of the believer. These are complementary. **The activity of the believer is the evidence of the Spirit’s activity and the activity of the Spirit is the cause of the believer’s activity.** (NICNT-Ro)

**J Vernon McGee** - That makes sense, doesn’t it? God does not drive His sheep; He leads them. When our Lord told of the safety and security of the sheep, He made it clear that they were not forced into the will of His hand and that of the Father. He said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them [and I drive them out! Oh, no] and they follow me” (John 10:27). They are the ones who are safe and secure; they follow Him. They are led by the Spirit of God. They hear His voice because they have a new nature, and they follow Him.

**C H Spurgeon** - [The Leading of the Spirit, the Secret Token of the Sons of God](#) -

#### I. WHITHER DOES THE SPIRIT OF GOD LEAD THE SONS OF GOD?

First of all, he leads them to repentance. One of the first acts of the Holy Spirit is to guide the sons of God to the mercy-seat with tears in their eyes. He leads us into the abominable chambers of imagery concealed within our fallen nature, unfastens door after door and sets open before our enlightened eyes the secret places polluted with idols and loathsome images portrayed upon the wall. He points out with his hand of light the idol gods, the images of jealousy, the unclean and abominable things within our nature, and thus he astonishes us into humility. We could not have believed that such evil things haunted our souls, but his discoveries undeceive us and correct our boastful estimates of ourselves. Then, with that same finger, he points to our past life and shows us the blots, the errors, the wilful sins, the sins of ignorance, the aggravated transgressions, the offences against light and knowledge, which have marred our career from our youth up: and whereas, previously, we looked upon the page of our life, and thought it fair, when the Spirit has led us into light we see how black our history has been, and, being filled with shame and sorrow, we cry out for the ear of God, that we may there confess our sin, and acknowledge that if he should smite us into hell it would be no more than we deserve. Dear friend, did the Holy Spirit ever lead you to the stool of repentance? Did he ever cause you to see how basely you have treated your God, and how shamefully you have neglected your Saviour? Did he ever make you bemoan yourself for your iniquities? There is no way to heaven but by Weeping-cross. He who never felt the burden of his sin will yet be crushed beneath its enormous weight when, like some tottering cliff, in judgment’s dreadful hour, it will fall upon him and grind him to powder. No man ever goes to the chamber of true repentance till the Holy Spirit leads him there, but every child of God knows what it is to look on him whom he has pierced, and mourn for his sin. Holy sorrow for sin is as indispensable as faith in the atoning blood, and the same Spirit who gives us peace through the great sacrifice also works in us a hearty grief for having grieved the Lord. If you have from your youth up never felt any special mourning for sin, then may God begin the gracious work in your heart, for salvation is certainly not wrought in you. You must have repentance, for repentance is absolutely necessary to the divine life. “Except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish.” The prodigal must cry, “Father, I have sinned;” the publican must smite on his breast and pray, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” As well destroy one of the valves of the heart and yet hope to live as take away repentance, which is the inseparable life-companion of faith. A dry-eyed faith is no faith at all. When a man has his face towards Jesus his back is necessarily turned on his sins. As well look for spring in the garden without the snowdrop as look for grace in the heart without penitence. That faith which is not accompanied by repentance

is a spurious faith, and not the faith of God's elect; for no man ever trusts Christ till he feels he needs a Saviour, and he cannot have felt that he needs a Saviour unless he has been wearied with the burden of his sin. The Holy Ghost leads men first to repentance.

He leads them at the same time, while they think little of themselves, to think much of Jesus. Were you ever led to the cross, beloved? Did you ever stand there, and feel the burden fall from off your shoulders, and roll away into the Redeemer's sepulchre? When Dr. Neale, the eminent Ritualist, took John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress," and Romanized it, he represented the pilgrim as coming to a certain bath, into which he was plunged and washed, and then his burden was washed away. He explains this to be the bath of baptism, though I have never yet seen in any Ritualistic church a baptistry large enough to wash a pilgrim in. However, according to this doctored edition of the allegory, Christian was washed in the laver of baptism, and all his sins were thus removed. That is the High Church mode of getting rid of sin: John Bunyan's way, and the true way, is to lose it at the cross. Now, mark what happened. According to Dr. Neale's "Pilgrim's Progress," that burden grew again on the pilgrim's back, and I do not wonder that it did, for a burden which baptism can remove is sure to come again: but the burden which is lost at the cross never appears again for ever. There is no effectual cleansing for sin except by faith in that matchless atonement offered once for all on Calvary's bloody tree, and as many as are led there by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. The Spirit of God never led a man to think little of Christ, and much of priests. The Spirit of God never led a man to think little of the atoning blood and of simple faith in it, and much of outward forms and ceremonies. The Spirit of God sinks the man and lifts up the Saviour, lowers flesh and blood into the grave, and gives to man new life in the risen Lord, who also hath ascended up on high. "He shall glorify me," said Christ of the Comforter; and that indeed is the Comforter's office.

Now, my dear friends, has the Spirit ever made the Lord Jesus glorious in your eyes? Brethren and sisters, this is the one point above all others. If the Holy Ghost has never made Christ precious to you, you know nothing about him. If he has not lifted Jesus up and sunk your own confidences, if he has not made you feel that Christ is all you want, and that more than all in him you find, then he has never wrought a divine change in your heart. Repentance and faith must stand gazing upon the bleeding Saviour, or else hope will never join them and bring peace as his companion.

When the Spirit has glorified Jesus he leads us to know other truths. The Holy Ghost leads the sons of God into all truth. Others go astray after this falsehood or that, but the sheep of God will not hear the voice of strange leaders, their ears are closed to their flatteries: "a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." Beloved, no lie is of the truth, and no man who receives a lie has been led by the Spirit of God into it, let him say what he may. On the other hand, truth is like a closed chamber to the unregenerate man; he may read the table of contents of the precious storehouse, but into that secret room he cannot enter: there is one that hath the key of David, who openeth and no man shutteth; and the key with which he openeth is the power of the Holy Ghost. When he opens up a doctrine to a man, the man learns it aright, but he never can know it else. You may go to college, and sit at the feet of the most learned Gamaliel of the day, but you can never know the truth in the heart unless the Holy Ghost shall teach you. We never know a truth in the power of it till it is burned into our soul, as with a hot iron, by an experience of its power, or engraven as upon brass by the mystic revelation of the Spirit. Only the Spirit of God can interweave the truth with the heart, and make it part and parcel of ourselves, so that it is in us and we are in it. Have you thus been led into the truth? If so, give God the glory, for thus the Spirit of God certifies your adoption.

The children of God are led not only into knowledge, but into love. They are brought to feel the warmth of love as well as to see the light of truth. The Spirit of God causes every true-born son of God to burn with love to the rest of the family. He who is a stranger to Christian love is a stranger to divine grace. Brethren, we have our disputes, for we dwell where it must needs be that offences come; but we would be slow to take offence and slower still to give it, for we are one in Christ Jesus, and our hearts are knit together by his Spirit. I take it that no honest man ought to hold his tongue concerning any of the errors of the day, it is a mean way of cultivating ease for yourself, and gaining a popularity not worth the having; we must speak the truth whether we offend or please, but this is to be done in love and because of love. God save us from that suggestion of Satan which advises us to speak only those soft things which please men's ears, for he who gives way to this persuasion is a traitor to truth and to the souls of men. The true man of God must speak against every evil and false way; but there beats in his heart a strong affection to every child of God, whatever his errors and his faults may be. The knife of the surgeon is mercifully cruel to the cancer, not out of ill-will to his patient, but out of an honest desire to benefit him; such affectionate faithfulness we have need to cultivate. Love to the saints is the token of the saints. There is an inner church of God's own elect, within everyone of the Christian denominations, and

this church is made up of men spiritually enlightened, who know the marrow and mystery of the gospel, and whenever they meet, however diversified may be their views, they recognise one another by a sort of sacred freemasonry, the one Spirit which quickens them all alike leaps within them as it recognises the one life in the bosoms of others. Despite their mental divergences, ecclesiastical associations, and doctrinal differences, spiritual men no sooner hear the password, and catch the mystic sign, than they cry, "Give me thy hand, my brother, for my heart is even as thy heart. The Spirit of God has led me and he has led thee, and in our way we tread step by step together; therefore let us have fellowship with each other." The outsiders of the camp, the mixed multitude that come up out of Egypt with our Israel, fall both into fighting and lusting; but the children of the living God, who make the central body-guard of the ark of the Lord, are one in heart with each other, and must be so. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

The Holy Spirit leads us into intense love for the souls of sinners. If any man shall say, "It is no business of mine whether men are lost or saved," the Spirit of God never led him into such inhumanity. Bowels of iron have never felt the touch of the Spirit of Love. If ever a preacher's spirit and teaching legitimately lead you to the conclusion that you may view the damnation of your fellow men with complacency or indifference, you may be sure that the Spirit of God never led him or you in that direction. The devil has more to do with some men's pitiless theology than they imagine. Christ's eyes wept over the sinner's doom, may the Lord save us from thinking of it in any other spirit. He who does not love his fellow man whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? Does God look with complacency upon the ruin of our race? Did he not love men so well that he gave his only begotten Son for them? And will he have his own children cold, stoical, and indifferent to the loss of human souls? Beloved, if we dwell with Cain and cry, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the Spirit of God never led us there; he leads us into tenderness, sympathy, compassion, and tearful effort, if by any means we may save some.

Further, the Spirit of God leads the sons of God into holiness. I shall not attempt to define what holiness is. That is best seen in the lives of holy men. Can it be seen in your lives? Beloved, if you are of a fierce, unforgiving spirit, the Holy Ghost never led you there; if you are proud and hectoring, the Holy Ghost never led you there; if you are covetous, and lustful after worldly gain, the Holy Ghost never led you there; if you are false in your statements, and unjust in your actions, the Holy Ghost never led you there. If I hear of a professor of religion in the ball-room or the theatre, I know that the Holy Ghost never led him there; if I find a child of God mixing with the ungodly, using their speech, and doing their actions, I am persuaded the Holy Ghost never led him there. But if I see a man living as Christ would have lived, loving and tender, fearless, brave, honest, in all things minding to keep a good conscience before God and men, I hope that the Spirit of God has led him; if I see that man devout before his God, and full of integrity before his fellow men, then I hope and believe that the Spirit of God is his leader and influences his character. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." I do not wish to speak sharply, but I feel that I must speak plainly, and I feel bound to say that there is far too much hypocrisy among professing Christian people. Many wear the name of Christian, and have nothing else that is Christian about them. It is sorrowful that it should be so, but so it is: false professors have lowered the standard of Christian character, and made the church so like the world that it is hard to say where one begins and the other ends. We exercise church discipline as best we can, but for all that there is a seed of mischief which does not develop into open and overt sin which we cannot remove by discipline, for we are forbidden to root up the tares lest we root up the wheat with them. Men and brethren, we must be holy! It is of no use our talking about being orthodox in belief: we must be orthodox in life, and, if we are not, the soundest creed will only increase our damnation. I hear men boast that they are Nonconformists to the backbone, as if that were the essential matter: better far be Christians to the heart. What is the use of ecclesiastical Nonconformity if the heart is still conformed to the world? Another man will glory that he is a Conformist, but what is the good of that unless he is conformed to the image of Christ? Holiness is the main consideration, and if we are not led into it by the Spirit of holiness neither are we the sons of God.

Furthermore, the Holy Ghost leads those who are the children of God into vital godliness—the mystic essence of spiritual life. For instance, the Holy Ghost leads the saints to prayer, which is the vital breath of their souls. Whenever they get true access to the mercy-seat it is by his power. The Holy Spirit leads them to search the word, and opens their understandings to receive it; he leads them into meditation, and the chewing of the cud of truth; he leads them into fellowship with himself and with the Son of God. He lifts them right away from worldly cares into heavenly contemplations; he leads them away to the heavenly places, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, and where his saints reign with him. Beloved, have you ever felt these leadings? I am

talking of them, but do you understand them? Are these things matters of constant experience with you? It is easy to say, "Yes, I know what you mean." Have you felt them? Are these every-day things with you, for, as the Lord liveth, if you have not been led into prayer, and into communion with God, the Spirit of God is not in you, and you are none of his?

The Spirit of God, moreover, leads the sons of God into usefulness, some in one path, and some in another, while a few are conducted into very eminent service, and into self-consecration of the highest order. We bless God for missionaries who have been led of the Spirit of God among the wildest tribes to preach Jesus Christ. We thank God for holy women who, at home, have been led into the darkest parts of this city to labour amongst the most fallen and depraved, to lift up Christ before them that he might lift them up to himself. Blessed are those men and women who are led by the Spirit of God into labours more abundant, for the more abundant shall be their joy. Methinks I ought to remind you all that if you are doing nothing for Jesus the Spirit of God has never led you into this idleness. If you eat the fat and drink the sweet in the house of God, but never do a hand's turn for the household, the Spirit of God cannot have taught you this abominable sloth. There is a something for everyone of us to do, a talent committed to the charge of every believer, and if we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us he will tell us what the Lord has appointed us to perform, he will strengthen us for the doing of it, and set his seal and blessing upon it when it is done. Those dead branches of the vine which yield no clusters for the Lord, either by patience in suffering or activity in working, have no evidence that they are of the household of faith. Those who take no part in labours for Jesus can hardly hope that they will ultimately be partakers in his glory with him.

Thus have I, in a plain manner, without diving too deep into the matter, given you an answer to the question, "Whither does the Spirit of God lead the sons of God?"

## **II. I shall now answer another question with still greater brevity—HOW DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD THE SONS OF GOD?**

The reply would be this: the Spirit of God operates upon our spirits mysteriously. We cannot explain his mode of operation, except that we shall probably be right if we conclude that he operates upon our spirits somewhat in the same way in which our spirits operate upon other men's spirits, only after a nobler sort. Now, how do I influence the spirit of my friend? I do it usually by imparting to him something which I know, which I hope will have power over his mind by suggesting motives to him, and so influencing his acts. I cannot operate upon my neighbour's mind mechanically; no tool can touch the heart, no hand can shape the mind. We act upon matter by machinery, but upon mind by argument, by reason, by instruction, and so we endeavour to fashion men as we desire. One great instrument which the Holy Ghost uses upon the mind is the word of God. The word, as we have it printed in the Bible, is the great instrument in the hand of the Spirit for leading the children of God in the right way. If you want to know what you ought to do, say as the old Scotchman used to say to his wife, "Reach down yon Bible." That is the map of the way, the heavenly pilgrim's knapsack guide; and if you are led by the word of God the Spirit of God is with the word, and works through it, and you are led by the Spirit of God. Quote chapter and verse for an action, and, unless you have wrested the passage, you may rest assured you have acted rightly. Be sure that such and such a thing is a command of God written in the book, inspired by the Holy Ghost, and you do not need a voice of thunder from heaven or an angelic whisper, you have a more sure word of prophecy, unto which you will do well if you take heed as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.

The Spirit of God also speaks through his ministers. The word preached is often blest, as well as the word written, but this can only be the case when the word preached is in conformity with the word written. At times God's ministers seem to give the written word its own voice, so that it sounds forth as if just spoken by the seer who originally received it. As they speak it drops into the ear like honey from the comb, it leaps forth like water from the wellhead; and at such times goes into the heart fresh and warm, with even a greater energy than when we read it alone in our chamber. How often do we feel when we read a truth in a book (even though that book is God's word) our sluggish condition prevents its having such power over us as it has when a man of God who has experienced it, and tasted it, and handled it, speaks of it as the outpouring of his own soul. May God grant that the ministry which you usually attend may be to you the voice of God. May it be guidance to your feet, comfort to your heart, invigoration to your faith, and refreshment to your soul, and while you are sitting in the house of prayer may you feel, "That word is for me: I came here not knowing what to do, but I have received direction; I was faint and weary, but I have obtained consolation and strength. The voice of the pastor has been as the oracle of God to my soul, and now I go my way comforted as Hannah did when the Lord's servant had spoken peace to her soul."



Upon another point I would speak with great caution, and would have you think of it with more caution still, for it is a matter which has been sadly abused and turned to fanatical purposes. The Spirit of God does, I believe, directly, even apart from the word, speak in the hearts of the saints. There are inward monitions which are to be devoutly obeyed, guidances mysterious and secret, which must be implicitly followed. It is not a subject for common talk, but is meant for the ear of the intelligent believer who will not misunderstand us. There will come to you sometimes, you know not why, certain inward checks, such as Paul received when he essayed to go into Mysia, but the Spirit suffered him not. There is a certain act which you might do or might not do, but an impulse comes upon you which seems to say, "Not that, or not now." Do not violate that inward restraint. "Quench not the Spirit." At another time a proper thing, a fit thing, will have been forgotten by you for a time, but it comes upon you strongly that it is to be done at once, and for some reason you cannot shake off the impression. Do no violence to that impulse. It is not to every man that the Holy Ghost speaks in such a way; but he has his favoured ones, and these must jealously guard the privilege, for perhaps if they are deaf when he speaks he may never speak to them any more in that way. If we render reverent obedience to divine monitions they will become far more common with us. "Why," says one, "you run into Quakerism." I cannot help that. If this is Quakerism I am so far a Quaker: names do not concern me one way or another. You each one know whether your personal experience gives confirmation to what I have advanced or otherwise, and there let the question end; for, mark you, I advance this with caution, and do not set up such monitions as indispensable signs of a son of God. There is a story told (and many such some of us could tell almost as striking) of a certain friend who one night was influenced to take his horse from the stable, and ride some six or seven miles to a certain house where lived a person whom he had never seen. He arrived at dead of night, knocked at the door, and was answered by the master of the house, who seemed to be in great confusion of mind. The midnight visitor said, "Friend, I have been sent to thee, I know not why, but surely the Lord has some reason for having sent me to thee. Is there anything peculiar about thy circumstances?" The man, struck with amazement, asked him to come up stairs, and there showed him a halter tied to a beam. He was putting the rope about his neck to commit suicide when a knock sounded at the door, he resolved that he would go down and answer the call, and then return and destroy himself; but the friend whom God had sent talked to him, brought him to a cooler mind, and helped him in the pecuniary difficulty which embarrassed him, and the man lived to be an honourable Christian man. I solemnly declare that monitions equally powerful have guided me, and their results have been remarkable to me at any rate. For the most part these are secrets between God and my own soul, neither am I eager to break the seal and tell them to others. There are too many swine about for us to be very lavish with our pearls. If we were obedient to such impulses if we did not save suicides we might save souls, and might often be in the hands of God as angels sent from heaven: but we are like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle; we are not tender enough to be sensitive to the divine influence when it comes, and so the Lord does not please to speak to many of us in this way so frequently as we could desire. Still, it is true that "as many as are led by the Spirit of God," however he may lead them, "they are the sons of God."

Let me here remark that being "led by the Spirit of God" is a remarkable expression. It does not say, "As many as are driven by the Spirit of God." No, the devil is a driver, and when he enters either into men or into hogs he drives them furiously. Remember how the whole herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea. Whenever you see a man fanatical and wild, whatever spirit is in him it is not the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is forcible, it worketh mightily, but it is a quiet Spirit; it is not an eagle, but a dove. He comes as a rushing wind, and fills the house where the disciples are sitting, but at the same time he comes not as a whirlwind from the wilderness to smite the four corners of the habitation, or it would become a ruin. He comes as a flame of fire sitting upon each of the favoured ones, but it is not a flame of fire that burns the house and destroys Jerusalem. No, the Spirit of God is gentle; he does not drive, but lead. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." The Spirit treats us honourably in thus working; he does not deal with us as with dumb, driven cattle, or soulless waves of the sea; he treats us as intelligent beings, made for thought and reflection. He leads us as a man guideth his child, or as one leadeth his fellow, and we are honoured by subjecting our minds and wills to so divine a Spirit. Never is the will truly free until the Holy Ghost sweetly subdues it to willing obedience.

Thus the Spirit of God works, though we cannot explain the method, for that is a thing too wonderful for us, and sooner may we know the path of an eagle in the air, or the way of a serpent upon a rock. As we cannot walk in search of the springs of the sea, so is this also hidden from all living. "We have said somewhat upon the subject, and, as far as we can, have answered the question, "How does the Spirit of God lead the children of God?" but we are of yesterday, and know nothing, and, therefore, confessing our ignorance, we pass on.

**III. The last question is, WHEN DOES THE SPIRIT LEAD THE SONS OF GOD? Ah, brethren, that question needs anxious answering.**

The Spirit of God would always lead the sons of God, but, alas, there are times when even children of God will not be led. They are wilful and headstrong, and start aside. The healthy condition of a child of God is to be always led by the Spirit of God. Mark this—led by the Spirit every day; not on Sundays only, nor alone at periods set apart for prayer, but during every minute of every hour of every day. We ought to be led by the Spirit in little things as well as in great matters, for, observe, if we were led by the Spirit all our lives in all other matters, yet, if only one action apart from the Spirit were suffered to run to its full results, it would ruin us. The mercy is that the Lord restoreth our souls; but there is never a single hour when a Christian can afford to wander from the way of the Spirit. If you have a guide along an intricate pathway, and you allow him to conduct you for half an hour, and then say, “Now, I shall direct myself for the next five minutes,” in that short space you will lose the benefit of having a guide at all. It is clear that a pilot who only occasionally directs the ship is very little better than none. If you were traversing an unknown and difficult pathway it would render all directions useless if you were to say, “They told me to turn to the right at this corner, but I mean to try the left.” That one turning will affect the whole of your after journey. If we err, and are really sons of God, our divine leader will make us retrace our steps with bitter tears, and feel what an evil and bitter thing it is to have chosen our own delusions. If we use our divine leader wisely we shall always follow him. Child of God, the Spirit must lead you in everything. “Well, but,” say you, “will he?” Ah, “Will he?” Yes, to your astonishment. When you are in difficulties, consult the Holy Spirit in the Word. Hear what God speaks in the inspired volume, and if no light comes from thence kneel down and pray. When you see a sign-post in a country road, and it tells you which way to go, you are glad to follow its directions; but if in your perplexities you see no sign-post, what are you to do? Pray. Cast yourself upon the divine guidance, and you shall make no mistake; for even if you happen to pick the roughest road it will be the right one if you have selected it with holy caution, and in the fear of God. Beloved, the Lord will never let a vessel be dashed upon the rocks whose tiller has been given into his hands. Give up the helm to God, and your barque will thread the narrow winding channel of life, avoid every sandbank and sunken rock, and arrive safely at the fair havens of eternal bliss.

The question—when are the sons of God led by the Spirit? is to be answered thus,—when they are as they should be they are always distinctly led by him; and though, owing to sin in them, they are not always obedient to the same degree, yet the power which usually influences their lives is the Spirit of God.

Now I close, using the text thus. First as a test. Am I a child of God? If so, I am led by the Spirit. Am I led by the Spirit? I am afraid some of you never think of that matter. By whom are you led? Hundreds of religious people are led by their minister or by a Christian friend, and so far so good for them; but their religion will be a failure unless they are led by the Spirit. Let me put the question again that you may not shirk it,—Are you led by the Spirit? If you are you are a child of God, and if not you are none of his.

That gives me a second use of the text, namely, the use of consolation. If you are a child of God you will be led by the Spirit. Now, are you in doubt to-night? Are you embarrassed? Are you in difficulties? Then the sons of God are led by the Spirit, and you will be led. Perhaps you are looking a long way ahead, and you are afraid of difficulties in your old age, or at the death of a relative. Now, God has not given us eyes to pry into the future, and what is the use of our peering where we cannot see? Leave it all to your heavenly Father; and you will be unerringly led by the Holy Ghost. When you come to the place where you thought there would be a difficulty, very likely there will be none. “Who shall roll away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?” said the holy women, but when they came to the sepulchre, lo, the stone was rolled away already. Go on as a child of God, walking by faith, with the full assurance that the path of faith, if not an easy one, will always be a safe one; and all will be well, and you will be led in a right way to a city of habitations.

The last word of all is, the text is an assurance. If you are led by the Spirit of God then you are most certainly a son of God. Can you say to-night, “I do yield myself up to the Lord’s will. I am not perfect, I wish I were; I am burdened with a thousand infirmities, but yet if the Lord will teach me I am willing to learn, if he will have patience with me I will strive to follow him. Oh, what would I give to be perfectly holy! I long to be pure within. I wish above all things else in this world that I may never grieve my God, but walk with him in the light as he is in the light, and have fellowship with him, while the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses me from all sin”? My brother, be well assured that none ever longed like that but a child of God. Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee. No soul, except an heir of heaven, ever had such wishings, and aspirings, and groanings after holiness, and such sorrowings over failures and mistakes. The text does not say, “He who runs in the Spirit is a son of God,” but he that is led by the Spirit of God. Now, we may stumble whilst we are being led; a man may

go very slowly while he is being led; he may go on crutches while he is being led; he may crawl on his hands and knees while he is being led: but none of these absolutely prevent his being truly led. With all your weaknesses and infirmities, the point is—Are you led by the Spirit of God? If you are, all your infirmities and failures are forgiven you for Christ's name's sake, and your being led is the mark of your being born from above. Go home and rejoice in your sonship, and pray God if you have been weak to make you strong, if you have been lame to heal you, and, if you have crept along on your hands and knees, to help you to walk uprightly; but, after all, bless him that his Spirit does lead you. If you can only walk, ask him to make you run; and if you can run, ask him to make you mount on wings as eagles. Do not be satisfied with anything short of the highest attainments; and, at the same time, if you have not reached them, do not despair. Remember that in most families there are babes as well as men and women: the little child in long clothes carried in the arms, and laid on the breast, is just as dear to the parent as the son who in the fulness of his manhood marches by his father's side, and takes his share in the battle of life. You are sons of God if you are led by the Spirit, however small your stature and feeble your grace. The age, strength, or education of the man are not essential to his sonship, but the trueness of his birth is the all-important matter. See ye to it that ye are led by the Spirit, or your parentage is not from above.

If you have been condemned by this sermon, then fly away to Jesus, and penitently and trustfully rest in him. May the Spirit of God lead you to do that, and you are then a child of God. May he bless you now. Amen.

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## **B B Warfield - THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT**

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.”—ROM. 8:14. (R. V.).

THESE words constitute the classical passage in the New Testament on the great subject of the “leading of the Holy Spirit.” They stand, indeed, almost without strict parallel in the New Testament. We read, no doubt, in that great discourse of our Lord's which John has preserved for us, in which, as He was about to leave His disciples, He comforts their hearts with the promise of the Spirit, that “when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth.” But this “guidance into truth” by the Holy Spirit is something very different from the “leading of the Spirit” spoken of in our present text; and it is appropriately expressed by a different term. We read also in Luke's account of our Lord's temptation that He was “led by the Spirit in the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil,” where our own term is used. But though undoubtedly this passage throws light upon the mode of the Spirit's operation described in our text, it can scarcely be looked upon as a parallel passage to it. The only other passage, indeed, which speaks distinctly of the “leading of the Spirit” in the sense of our text is Gal. 5:18, where in a context very closely similar Paul again employs the same phrase: “But if ye are led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” It is from these two passages primarily that we must obtain our conception of what the Scriptures mean by “the leading of the Holy Spirit.”

There is certainly abundant reason why we should seek to learn what the Scriptures mean by “spiritual leading.” There are few subjects so intimately related to the Christian life, of which Christians appear to have formed, in general, conceptions so inadequate, where they are not even positively erroneous. The sober-minded seem often to look upon it as a mystery into which it would be well not to inquire too closely. And we can scarcely expect those who are not gifted with sobriety to guide us in such a matter into the pure truth of God. The consequence is that the very phrase, “the leading of the Spirit,” has come to bear, to many, a flavor of fanaticism. Many of the best Christians would shrink with something like distaste from affirming themselves to be “led by the Spirit of God”; and would receive with suspicion such an averment on the part of others, as indicative of an unbalanced religious mind. It is one of the saddest effects of extravagance in spiritual claims that, in reaction from them, the simple-minded people of God are often deterred from entering into their privileges. It is surely enough, however, to recall us to a careful searching of Scripture in order to learn what it is to be “led by the Spirit of God,” simply to read the solemn words of our text: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” If the case be so, surely it behooves all who would fain believe themselves to be God's children to know what the leading of the Spirit is.

Let us, then, commit ourselves to the teaching of Paul, and seek to learn from him what is the meaning of this high privilege. And may the Spirit of truth here too be with us and guide us into the truth.

Approaching the text in this serious mood, the first thing that strikes us is that the leading of the Spirit of God of which it speaks is not something peculiar to eminent saints, but something common to all God's children, the universal possession of the people of God.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God,” says the apostle, “these are sons of God.” We have here in effect a definition of the sons of God. The primary purpose of the sentence is not, indeed, to give this definition. But the statement is so framed as to equate its two members, and even to throw a stress upon the coextensiveness of the two designations. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these and these only are sons of God.” Thus, the leading of the Spirit is presented as the very characteristic of the children of God. This is what differentiates them from all others. All who are led by the Spirit of God are thereby constituted the sons of God; and none can claim the high title of sons of God who are not led by the Spirit of God. The leading of the Spirit thus appears as the

constitutive fact of sonship. And we dare not deny that we are led by God's Spirit lest we therewith repudiate our part in the hopes of a Christian life. In this aspect of it our text is the exact parallel of the immediately preceding declaration, which it thus takes up and repeats: "But if any one hath not the Spirit of Christ, that one is not His."

It is obviously a mistake, therefore, to look upon the claim to be led by God's Spirit as an evidence of spiritual pride. It is rather a mark of spiritual humility. This leading of the Spirit is not some peculiar gift reserved for special sanctity and granted as the reward of high merit alone. It is the common gift poured out on all God's children to meet their common need, and is the evidence, therefore, of their common weakness and their common unworthiness. It is not the reward of special spiritual attainment; it is the condition of all spiritual attainment. In its absence we should remain hopelessly the children of the devil; by its presence alone are we constituted the children of God. It is only because of the Spirit of God shed abroad in our hearts that we are able to cry, Abba, Father.

We observe, therefore, next that the end, in view in the spiritual leading of which Paul speaks is not to enable us to escape the difficulties, dangers, trials or sufferings of this life, but specifically to enable us to conquer sin.

Had the former been its object, it might indeed have been a special grace granted to a select few of God's children, and its possession might have separated them from among their brethren as the peculiar favorites of the Deity. Since, however, the latter is its object, it is the appropriate gift of all those who are sinners, and is the condition of their conquest over the least of their sins. In the preceding context Paul discovers to us our inherent sin in all its festering rottenness. But he discovers to us also the Spirit of God as dwelling in us and forming the principle of a new life. It is by the presence of the Spirit within us alone that the bondage in which we are by nature held to sin is broken; that we are emancipated from sin and are no longer debtors to live according to the flesh. This new principle of life reveals itself in our consciousness as a power claiming regulative influence over our actions; leading us, in a word, into holiness.

If we consider our life of new obedience from the point of view of our own activities, we may speak of ourselves as fighting the good fight of faith; a deeper view reveals it as the work of God in us by His Spirit. When we consider this Divine work within our souls with reference to the end of the whole process we call it sanctification; when we consider it with reference to the process itself, as we struggle on day by day in the somewhat devious and always thorny pathway of life, we call it spiritual leading. Thus the "leading of the Holy Spirit" is revealed to us as simply a synonym for sanctification when looked at from the point of view of the pathway itself, through which we are led by the Spirit as we more and more advance toward that conformity to the image of His Son, which God has placed before us as our great goal.

It is obvious at once then how grossly it is misconceived when it is looked upon as a peculiar guidance granted by God to His eminent servants in order to insure their worldly safety, worldly comfort, even worldly profit. The leading of the Holy Spirit is always for good; but it is not for all goods, but specifically for spiritual and eternal good. I do not say that the good man may not, by virtue of his very goodness, be saved from many of the sufferings of this life and from many of the failures of this life. How many of the evils and trials of life are rooted in specific sins we can never know. How often even failure in business may be traced directly to lack of business integrity rather than to pressure of circumstances or business incompetency is mercifully hidden from us. Nor do I say that the gracious Lord has no care for the secular life of His people. But it surely is obvious that the leading of the Spirit spoken of in the text is not in order to guide men into secular goods; and it is not to be inferred to be absent when trials come—sufferings, losses, despair of this world. It is specifically in order to guide them into eternal good; to make them not prosperous, not free from care or suffering, but holy, free from sin. It is not given us to save us from the consequences of our business carelessnesses or incompetencies, to take the place of ordinary prudence in the conduct of our affairs. It is not given us to preserve us from the necessity of strenuous preparation for the tasks before us or from the trouble of rendering decision in the difficult crises of life. It is given specifically to save us from sinning; to lead us in the paths of holiness and truth.

Accordingly, we observe next that the spiritual leading of which Paul speaks is not something sporadic, given only on occasion of some special need of supernatural direction, but something continuous, affecting all the operations of a Christian man's activities throughout every moment of his life.

It has but one end in view, the saving from sin, the leading into holiness; but it affects every single activity of every kind—physical, intellectual, and spiritual—bending it toward that end. Were it directed toward other ends, we might indeed expect it to be more sporadic. Were it simply the omniscience of God placed at the disposal of His favorites, which they might avail themselves of in times of perplexity and doubt, it might well be occasional and temporary. But since it is nothing other than the power of God unto salvation, it must needs abide with the sinner, work constantly upon him, enter into all his acts, condition all his doings, and lead him thus steadily onward toward the one great goal.

It is easy to estimate, then, what a perversion it is of the "leading of the Spirit" when this great saving energy of God, working continually in the sinner, is forgotten, and the name is accorded to some fancied sporadic supernatural direction in the common offices of life. Let us not forget, indeed, the reality of providential guidance, or imagine that God's greatness makes Him careless of the least concerns of His children. But let us much more not forget that the great evil under which we are suffering is sin, and that the great promise which has been given us is that we shall not be left to wander, self-directed, in the paths of sin into which our feet have strayed, but that the Spirit of holiness shall dwell within us, breaking our bondage and leading us into that other pathway of good works, which God has afore prepared that we should walk in them.

All of this will be powerfully supported and the subject perhaps somewhat further elucidated if we will seek now to penetrate a little deeper into the inmost nature of the work of the Holy Spirit which Paul calls here a “leading,” by attending more closely to the term which he has chosen to designate it when he calls it by this name. This term, as those skilled in such things tell us, is one which throws emphasis on three matters: on the extraneousness of the influence under which the movement suggested takes place; on the completeness of the control which this influence exerts over the action of the subject led; and on the pathway over which the resultant progress is made. Let us glance at each of these matters in turn.

One is not led when he goes his own way. It is only when an influence distinct from ourselves determines our movements that we can properly be said to be led. When Paul, therefore, declares that the sons of God are “led by the Spirit of God,” he emphasizes, first of all, the distinction between the leading Spirit and the led sons of God. As much as this he declares with great emphasis—that there is a power within us, not ourselves, that makes for righteousness. And he identifies this extraneous power with the Spirit of God. The whole preceding context accentuates this distinction, inasmuch as its entire drift is to paint the conflict which is going on within us between our native impulses which make for sin, and the intruded power which makes for righteousness. Before all else, then, spiritual leading consists in an influence over our actions of a power which is not to be identified with ourselves—either as by nature or as renewed—but which is declared by the apostle Paul to be none other than the Spirit of God Himself.

We thoroughly misconceive it, therefore, if we think of spiritual leading as only a conquest of our lower impulses by our higher nature, or even as a conquest by our regenerated nature of the remnants of the old man lingering in our members. Both of these conquests are realities of the Christian life. The child of God will never be content to be the slave of his lower impulses, but will ever strive, and with ultimate success, to live on the plane of his higher endowments. The regenerated soul will never abide the remnants of sin that vex his members, but will have no rest until he eradicates them to the last shred. But these victories of our nobler selves—natural or gracious—over what is unworthy within us, do not so much constitute the essence of spiritual leading as they are to be counted among its fruits. Spiritual leading itself is not a leading of ourselves by ourselves, but a leading of us by the Holy Ghost. The declaration of its reality is the declaration of the reality of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart, and of the subjection of the activities of the Christian heart and life to the control of this extraneous power. He that is led by the Spirit of God is not led by himself or by any element of his own nature, native or acquired, but is led by the Holy Ghost. He has ceased to be what the Scriptures call a “natural man,” and has become what they call a “spiritual man”; that is, to translate these terms accurately, he has ceased to be a self-led man and has become a Spirit-led man—a man led and determined in all his activities by the Holy Ghost. It is this extraneousness of the source of these activities which Paul emphasizes first of all when he declares that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

The second matter which is emphasized by his declaration is the controlling power of the influence exerted on the activities of God’s children by the Holy Spirit. One is not led, in the sense of our text, when he is merely directed in the way he should go, guided, as we may say, by one who points out the path and leads only by going before in it; or when he is merely upheld while he himself finds or directs himself to the goal.

The Greek language possesses words which precisely express these ideas, but the apostle passes over these and selects a term which expresses determining control over our actions. Some of these other terms are used elsewhere in the Scriptures to set forth appropriate actions of the Spirit with reference to the people of God. For example, our Lord promised His disciples that when the Spirit of Truth should come, He should guide them into all the truth. Here a term is employed which does not express controlling leading, but what we may perhaps call suggestive leading. It is used frequently in the Greek Old Testament of God’s guidance of His people, and once, at least, of the Holy Spirit: “Teach us to do Thy will, for Thou art my God; let Thy good Spirit guide us in the land of uprightness.” But the term which Paul employs in our text is a much stronger one than this. It is not the proper word to use of a guide who goes before and shows the way, or even of a commanding general, say, who leads an army. It has stamped upon it rather the conception of the exertion of a power of control over the actions of its subject, which the strength of the led one is insufficient to withstand.

This is the proper word to use, for example, when speaking of leading animals, as when our Lord sent His disciples to find the ass and her colt and commanded them “to loose them and lead them to Him” (Matt. 21:2); or as when Isaiah declares in the Scripture which was being read by the Eunuch of Ethiopia whom Philip was sent to meet in the desert, “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter.” It is applied to the conveying of sick folk—as men who are not in a condition to control their own movements; as, for example, when the good Samaritan set the wounded traveler on his own beast and led him to an inn and took care of him (Luke 10:34); or when Christ commanded the blind man of Jericho “to be led unto Him” (Luke 18:40). It is most commonly used of the enforced movements of prisoners; as when we are told that they led Jesus to Caiaphas to the palace (John 18:28); or when we are told that they seized Stephen and led him into the council (Acts 6:12); or that Paul was provided with letters to Damascus unto the synagogues, “that if he found any that were of the Way, he might lead them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:2). In a word, though the term may, of course, sometimes be used when the idea of force retires somewhat into the background, and is commonly so used when it is transferred from external compulsion to internal influence—as, for example, when we are told that Barnabas took Paul and led him to the apostles (Acts 9:2), and that Andrew led Simon unto Jesus (John 1:42)—yet the proper meaning of the word includes the idea of control, and the implication of prevailing determination of action never wholly leaves it.



Its use by Paul on the present occasion must be held, therefore, to emphasize the controlling influence which the Holy Spirit exercises over the activities of the children of God in His leading of them. That extraneous power which has come into our hearts making for righteousness, has not come into them merely suggest to us what we should do—merely to point out to us from within the way in which we ought to walk—merely to rouse within and keep before our minds certain considerations and inducements toward righteousness. It has come within us to take the helm and to direct the motion of our frail barks on the troubled sea of life. It has taken hold of us as a man seizes the halter of an ox to lead it in the way which he would have it go; as an attendant conducts the sick in leading him to the physician; as the jailer grasps the prisoner to lead him to trial or to the jail, We were slaves to sin; a new power has entered into us to break that bondage—but not that we should be set, rudderless, adrift on the ocean of life; but that we should be powerfully directed on a better course, leading to a better harbor.

Accordingly Paul, when he declares that we have been emancipated from the law of sin and of death by the advent of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus into our hearts, does not leave it so, as if emancipation were all. He adds, “Accordingly then, we are bound.” Though emancipated, still bound! We are bound; but no longer to the flesh, to live after the flesh, but to the Spirit, to live after the Spirit. He hastens, indeed, to point out that this is no hard bondage, but a happy one; that sons is a name better fitted to express its circumstances than “slaves”—that it includes childship and heirship to God and with Christ. But all this blessed assurance operates to exhibit the happy estate of the service into which we have been brought, rather than to alter the nature of it as service. The essence of the new relation is that it also is one of control, though a control by a beneficent and not a cruel power. We do not at all catch Paul’s meaning therefore, unless we perceive the strong emphasis which lies on this fact—that those who are led by the Spirit of God are under the control of the Spirit of God. The extraneous power which has come into us, making for righteousness, comes as a controlling power. The children of God are not the directors of their own activities; there is One that dwells in them who is not merely their guide, but their governor and strong regulator. They go, not where they would, but where He would; they do not what they might wish, but what He determines. This it is to be led by the Spirit of God.

It is to be observed, however, on the other hand, that although Paul uses a term here which emphasizes the controlling influence of the Spirit of God over the activities of God’s children, he does not represent the action of the Spirit as a substitute for their activities. If one is not led, in the sense of our text, when he is merely guided, it is equally true that one is not led when he is carried. The animal that is led by the attendant, the blind man that is led to Christ, the prisoner that is led to jail—each is indeed under the control of his leader, who alone determines the goal and the pathway; but each also proceeds on that pathway and to that goal by virtue of his own powers of locomotion.

There was a word lying at the apostle’s hand by which he could have expressed the idea that God’s children are borne by the Spirit’s power to their appointed goal of holiness, apart from any activities of their own, had He elected to do so. It is employed by Peter when he would inform us how God gave His message of old to His prophets. “For no prophecy,” he tells us, “ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being borne by the Holy Ghost.” This term, “borne,” emphasizes, as its fundamental thought, the fact that all the power productive of the motion suggested is inherent in, and belongs entirely to, the mover. Had Paul intended to say that God’s children are taken up as it were in the Spirit’s arms and borne, without effort on their own part, to their destined goal, he would have used this word. That he has passed over it and made use of the word “led” instead, indicates that, in his teaching, the Holy Spirit leads and does not carry God’s children to their destined goal of holiness; that while the Spirit determines both the end and the way toward it, His will controlling their action, yet it is by their effort that they advance to the determined end.

Here, therefore, there emerges an interesting indication of the difference between the Spirit’s action in dealing with the prophet of God in imparting through him God’s message to men, and the action of the same Spirit in dealing with the children of God in bringing them into their proper holiness of life. The prophet is “borne” of the Spirit; the child of God is “led.” The prophet’s attitude in receiving a revelation from God is passive, purely receptive; he has no part in it, adds nothing to it, is only the organ through which the Spirit delivers it to men; he is taken up by the Spirit, as it were, and borne along by Him by virtue of the power that resides in the Spirit, which is natural to Him, and which, in its exercise, supersedes the natural activities of the man. Such is the import of the term used by Peter to express it. On the other hand, the son of God is not purely passive in the hands of the sanctifying Spirit; he is not borne, but led—that is, his own efforts enter into the progress made under the controlling direction of the Spirit; he supplies, in fact, the force exerted in attaining the progress, while yet the controlling Spirit supplies the entire directing impulse. Such is the import of the term used by Paul to express it. Therefore no prophet could be exhorted to work out his own message with fear and trembling; it is not left to him to work it out—the Holy Spirit works it out for him and communicates it in all its rich completeness to and through him. But the children of God are exhorted to work out their own salvation in fear and trembling because they know the Spirit is working in them both the willing and the doing according to His own good pleasure.

In order to appreciate this element of the apostle’s teaching at its full value it is perhaps worth while to observe still further that in his choice of a term to express the nature of the Spirit’s action in leading God’s children the apostle avoids all terms which would attribute to the Spirit the power employed in making progress along the chosen road. Not only does he not represent us as being carried by the Spirit; he does not even declare that we are drawn by Him. There was a term in common use which the apostle could have used had he intended to express the idea that the Spirit drags, by physical force as it were, the children of God onward in the direction in which He would have them go. This term is actually used when the Saviour declares that no man can come unto Him except the Father draw him (John 6:44)—which is as much as to say that men in the first instance do not and cannot come to Christ

by virtue of any powers native to themselves, but require the action upon them of a power from without, coming to them, drawing their inert, passive weight to Christ, if they are to be brought to Him at all. We can identify this act of drawing—"dragging" would perhaps express the sense of the Greek term none too strongly—with that act which we call, in our theological analysis, regeneration, and which we explain in accordance with the import of this term, as the monergistic act of God, impinging on a sinner who is and remains, as far as this act is concerned, purely passive, and therefore does not move, but is moved.

Such, however, is not the method of the Spirit's leading of which Paul speaks in our text. This is not a drawing or dragging of a passive weight toward a goal which is attained, if attained at all, only by virtue of the power residing in the moving Spirit; but a leading of an active agent to an end determined indeed by the Spirit, and along a course which is marked out by the Spirit, but over which the soul is carried by virtue of its own power of action and through its own strenuous efforts. If we are not borne by the Spirit out of ours into holiness with a smooth and easy movement, almost unnoted by us or noted only with the languid pleasure with which a child resting peacefully on its mother's breast may note its progress up some rough mountain road, so neither are we dragged by the Spirit as a passive weight over the steep and rugged path. We are led. We are under His control and walk in the path in which He sets our feet. It is His part to keep us in the path and to bring us at length to the goal. But it is we who tread every step of the way; our limbs that grow weary with the labor; our hearts that faint, our courage that fails—our faith that revives our sinking strength, our hope that instills new courage into our souls—as we toil on over the steep ascent.

And thus it is most natural that the third matter to which Paul's declaration that we are led by the Spirit of God directs our attention concerns the pathway over which our progress is made.

One is not led who is unconscious of the road over which he advances; such a one is rather carried. He who is led treads the road himself, is aware of its roughness and its steepness, pants with the effort which he expends, is appalled by the prospect of the difficulties that open out before him, rejoices in the progress made, and is filled with exultant hope as each danger and obstacle is safely surmounted. He who is led is in the hands of an extraneous power, of a power which controls his actions; but the pathway over which he is thus led is trodden by his own efforts—by his own struggles it may be—and the goal that is attained is attained at the cost of his own labor.

When Paul chooses this particular term, therefore, and declares that the sons of God are led by the Spirit, he is in no way forgetful of the arduous nature of the road over which they are to advance, or of the strenuous exertion on their own part by which alone they may accomplish it. He strengthens and comforts them with the assurance that they are not to tread the path alone; but he does not lull them into inertness by suggesting that they are not to tread it. The term he employs avouches to them the constant and continuous presence with them of the leading Spirit, not merely setting them in the right path, but keeping them in it and leading them through it; for it designates not an impulse which merely initiates a movement in a given direction, but a continuous influence unbrokenly determining a movement to its very goal. But his language does not promise them relief from the weariness of the journey, alleviation of the roughness of the road, freedom from difficulty or danger in its course, or emancipation from the labor of travel. That they have been placed in the right path, that they will be kept continuously in it, that they will attain the goal—of this he assures them; for this it is to be led of the Spirit of God, a power not ourselves controlling our actions, prevalently directing our movement to an end of His choice. But He does not encourage us to relax our own endeavors; for he who is led, even though it be by the Spirit of God, advances by virtue of his own powers and his own efforts. In a word, Paul chooses language to express the action of the Spirit on the sons of God which is in perfect harmony with his exhortation to the children of God to which we have already alluded—to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling because they know it is God that is working in them both the willing and the doing according to His own good pleasure.

What a strong consolation for us is found in this gracious assurance—poor, weak children of men as we are! To our frightened ears the text may come at first as with the solemnity of a warning: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these and these only are sons of God." Is there not a declaration here that we are not God's children unless we are led by God's Spirit? Knowing ourselves, and contemplating the course of our lives and the character of our ambitions, dare we claim to be led by the Spirit of God? Is this life—this life that I am living in the flesh—is this the product of the Spirit's leading? Shall not despair close in upon me as I pass the dreadful judgment on myself that I am not led by God's Spirit, and that I am, therefore, not one of His sons? Let us hasten to remind ourselves, then, that such is not the purport nor the purpose of the text. It stands here not in order to drive us to despair, because we see we have sin within us; but to kindle within us a great fire of hope and confidence because we perceive we have the Holy Spirit within us.

Paul, as we have seen, does not forget the sin within us. Who has painted it and its baleful power with more vigorous touch? But neither would he have us forget that we have the Holy Spirit within us, and what that blessed fact, above all blessed facts, means. He would not have us reason that because sin is in us we cannot be God's children; but in happy contradiction to this, that because the Holy Spirit is in us we cannot but be God's children. Sin is great and powerful; it is too great and too powerful for us; but the Holy Ghost is greater and more powerful than even sin. The discovery of sin in us might bring us to despair did not Paul discern the Holy Spirit in us—who is greater than sin—that he may quicken our hope.

This declaration that frightens us is not written, then, to frighten, but to console and to enhearten. It stands here for the express purpose of comforting those who would despair at the sight of their sin. Is there a conflict of sin and holiness in you? asks Paul. This

very fact that there is conflict in you is the charter of your salvation. Where the Holy Spirit is not, there conflict is not; sin rules undisputed lord over the life. That there is conflict in you, that you do not rest in complacency in your sin, is a proof that the Spirit of God is within you, leading you to holiness. And all who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ Jesus. This is the purport of the message of the text to us. Paul points us not to the victory of good over evil, but to the conflict of good with evil—not to the end but to the process—as the proof of childship to God. The note of the passage is, thus, not one of fear and despair, but one of hope and triumph. “If God be for us who can be against us?”—that is the query the apostle would have ring in our hearts. Sin has a dreadful grasp upon us; we have no power to withstand it. But there enters our hearts a power not ourselves making for righteousness. This power is the Spirit of the most high God. “If God be for us who can be against us?” Let our hearts repeat this cry of victory to-day.

And as we repeat it, let us go onward, in hope and triumph, in our holy efforts. Let our slack knees be strengthened and new vigor enter our every nerve. The victory is assured. The Holy Spirit within us cannot fail us. The way may be rough; the path may climb the dizzy ascent with a rapidity too great for our faltering feet; dangers, pitfalls are on every side. But the Holy Spirit is leading us. Surely, in that assurance, despite dangers and weakness, and panting chest and swimming head, we can find strength to go ever forward.

In these days, when the gloom of doubt if not even the blackness of despair, has settled down on so many souls, there is surely profit and strength in the certainty that there is a portal of such glory before us, and in the assurance that our feet shall press its threshold at the last. In this assurance we shall no longer beat our disheartened way through life in dumb despondency, and find expression for our passionate but hopeless longings only in the wail of the dreary poet of pessimism:—

“But if from boundless spaces no answering voice shall start,  
Except the barren echo of our ever yearning heart—  
Farewell, then, empty deserts, where beat our aimless wings,  
Farewell, then, dream sublime of uncompassable things.”

We are not, indeed, relieved from the necessity for healthful effort, but we can no longer speak of “vain hopes.” The way may be hard, but we can no longer talk of “the unfruitful road which bruises our naked feet.” Strenuous endeavor may be required of us, but we can no longer feel that we are “beating aimless wings,” and can expect no further response from the infinite expanse than “a sterile echo of our own eternal longings.” No, no—the language of despair falls at once from off our souls. Henceforth our accents will be borrowed rather from a nobler “poet of faith,” and the blessing of Asher will seem to be spoken to us also:—

“Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,  
And as thy days, so shall thy strength be.  
There is none like unto God, O Jeshurun,  
Who rideth upon the heavens for thy help,  
And in His excellency on the skies.  
The eternal God is thy dwelling-place,  
And underneath are the everlasting arms.”

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#### Related Resources:

- Romans 8:14 Great Texts of the Bible [The Leading of the Spirit](#)- James Hastings
- [Multiple older sermons on Leading of the Spirit](#)

#### THESE ARE SONS OF GOD: houtoi huioi theou eisin (3PPAI):

- Ro 8:17; 2Cor 6:18; Gal 3:26; Eph 1:5-note; 1Jn 3:1-see note; Rev 21:7-[note](#)
- Romans 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

In a word, when the believer submits to the leading of the Holy Spirit, he or she is giving evidence (to themselves and to others) of their genuine (saving) faith in Jesus Christ.

**W H Griffith-Thomas** notes that...

The sonship mentioned in the former verse is here confirmed by an appeal to their personal experience. They had indeed received the Holy Spirit, but this gift was something altogether different from the spirit of bondage which would lead them again into servile fear. It was a "**spirit of adoption**" in which they were enabled to appeal to God as their Father. This contrast between slavery and sonship is very striking and goes to the heart

of the true Christian life. Anything that involves a believer in fear and bondage cannot possibly be the work of the Holy Spirit of God, and must come either from his own heart of unbelief or as a temptation of the Evil One. Our sonship implies perfect spiritual liberty and the absence of all legal features which would bring us once more "under law." It is the work of the Holy Spirit to lead the believer into a position of filial confidence which is the very opposite of all servility and thralldom.

The use here made by the Apostle of the idea of "**adoption**" is particularly interesting and should be carefully compared with the corresponding thought of our sonship as "regeneration." When it is said that we become God's children by regeneration the reference is to our relationship and union of nature. When we are said to become His children by adoption it refers to our position and privileges. One who has been, as it were, taken out of another family and adopted enters thereby into all the rights and privileges of sonship. So that regeneration concerns our nature and condition, while adoption concerns our position and privileges. The two are complementary aspects of our Divine sonship. (Romans-St Paul's Epistle to the Romans-A Devotional Commentary)

**Spurgeon** "Not those who say they are "the sons of God," but those who undoubtedly prove that they are, by being led, influenced, gently guided, by the Spirit of God."

**Jesus** said "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called **sons of God**. ( Matthew 5:9-note) (**Are you a peacemaker or a peace breaker?**)

We're members of God's family,  
We're children of the King;  
Because we've put our faith in Christ,  
To us He'll always cling. -Sper

**Sons of God** - Exact phrase 5x in NT - Mt 5:9-note Lk 20:36, Ro 8:14-note, Ro 8:19-note, Gal 3:26

**Sons** ([5207](#))(**huios**) is most literally used to describe a male offspring. Figuratively **huios** is one who on one hand is the object of parental love and care and on the other hand yields filial love and reverence toward the parent. Clearly, in the present context Paul is speaking of those who are spiritual offspring of God (cp Heb 2:10 [speaking of Jesus]-note; cp Heb 12:5-note)

**Huios** is used in Galatians 4:5 of a mature child of God in a legal standing as against a child of God (teknon) in his minority (Gal 4:1, 2, 3). God is the Father of all in the sense that He created all and His love and providential care are extended to all (see Mt 5:45-note). But contrary to popular opinion (or perhaps more accurately self-deception and "wishful thinking"!) not all men and women are God's children. In truth, all men have only one of two fathers, either God (believers) or the **Devil** (unbelievers). Jesus speaking to the "believing" (Jn 8:31) and yet unbelieving Jews (as shown by their deeds = Jn 8:57, 58, 59, cp Titus 1:16-note, Jas 1:22-note, Jas 2:18, 19, 20-note;) declared...

You are of your father the devil, and (**How does one recognize such a person?** Read on... ) you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer (Remember you don't have to do literally murder to be a murderer! cp Mt 5:21, 22-note) from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. (Jn 8:44)

People enter the family of God as "family members" when they become His children by grace through faith (Ep 2:8, 9-note) in God's only begotten Son (Jn 1:12,13, Acts 4:12, 16:31, Jn 8:24), and being **led by the Spirit** is one of the chief marks that one is truly a member of God's family.

The Old Testament often comments on God's **leading** of His children Israel through the wilderness (Ex 15:13 Dt 3:2 Ps 77:20 78:52 106:9 136:16 Jer 2:6,17 Hos 11:4 Am 2:10). Similarly, in the Old Testament we see that Israel is referred to as His "**sons**" or "**children**" when He redeemed them from Egypt (Ex 4:22 Dt 14:1, 32:5, 18, 19, 20 Ps 29:1, Isa 43:6, 45:11, 63:8, Jer 3:19, 22, Hos 1:10 11:1, 10). And we also see in the Old Testament that God's leading was sometimes associated with His Spirit (Neh 9:20, Ps 143:10, Isa 63:14).

How Slow I Wake!  
Sweet will of God! How slow I wake  
To hear your quiet word  
That tells my inner man to go,  
Uproot, depart, to leave my ways.  
But I arise. I stand to find  
Your Perfect way. And ah,  
My heart, long trembling, now is still.

Sweet Spirit, Guide, I go to do Your will.

The **Expositor's Bible Commentary** notes that "In the OT, **Israel** has the title **sons** (Deut 14:1; Hos 1:10; cf. Apocryphal Books Pss Sol 17:30; Wisdom 2:13-18). Now it belongs to the **heirs of the kingdom** who, meek and poor in spirit, loving righteousness yet merciful, are especially equipped for peacemaking and so reflect something of their heavenly Father's character (Mt 5:9-note). "There is no more godlike work to be done in this world than peacemaking" (Broadus). This beatitude must have been shocking to Zealots when Jesus preached it, when political passions were inflamed (Morison). ([Gaebelein, F. Editor: Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing](#))

**William Evans** in the **ISBE** has an excellent discussion on **sons of God**...

Men are not by nature the **sons of God**, at least not in the sense in which believers in Christ are so called. By nature those outside of Jesus Christ are "children of wrath" (see Ep 2:3-note), "of disobedience" (Ep 2:2-note), controlled not by the Spirit of God (Ro 8:14-note), but by the spirit of disobedience (Ep 2:2-note; Ep 2:3-note; Ep 2:3-note). Men become **sons of God** in the regenerative and adoptive sense by the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (Jn 1:12; Gal 3:26). The universal brotherhood which the New Testament teaches is that brotherhood which is based on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the divine and only Saviour of the world. And the same is true of the universal Fatherhood of God. It is true that all men are "His offspring" (Acts 17:28-note) in the sense that they are God's created children; but that the New Testament makes a very clear and striking distinction between sonship by virtue of creation and sonship by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, there can be no reasonable doubt.

Sonship is the present possession of the believer in Christ (1Jn 3:2-note). It will be completed at the second coming of our Lord (Ro 8:23-note), at which time the believer will throw off his incognito, by reason of which the world may not have recognized his sonship (1Jn 3:2-note), and be fully and gloriously revealed as the son of God (2Co 5:10-note). It doth not yet appear, it hath not yet appeared, what we shall be; the revelation of the **sons of God** is reserved for a coming day of manifestation.

The blessings of sonship are too numerous to mention, save in the briefest way. His sons are objects of God's peculiar love (John 17:23), and His Fatherly care (Lk 12:27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33). They have the family name (Ep 3:14-note; 1Jn 3:1-note); the family likeness (Ro 8:29-note); family love (John 13:35; 1Jn 3:14); a filial spirit (Ro 8:15-note; Gal 4:6); a family service (Jn 14:23; 15:8). They receive fatherly chastisement (Heb 12:5;6-note; He 12:7; 12:8; 12:9; 12:10-note; He 12:11-note); fatherly comfort (2Co 1:4), and an inheritance (Ro 8:17-note ;1Pe 1:3;1:4-note; 1Pe 1:5-note).

**Among the evidences of sonship are** being led by the Spirit (Ro 8:14-note; Gal 5:18-note); having a childlike confidence in God (Gal 4:5); having liberty of access (Ep 3:12-note); having love for the brethren (1Jn 2:9, 10, 11; 5:1), and obedience (1Jn 5:1, 2, 3). ([Orr, J. et al: International Standard Bible Encyclopedia](#)) (Bolding added)

**Wayne Barber**: explains that...

Paul repeats this same truth (Ro 8:14) in Galatians 5:16, 17, 18

But I say, **walk** (present imperative = command to make this your general direction, not a call for perfection) by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets (present tense = continually = this internal strife will continue until we see Jesus - 1Jn 3:2-note) its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition (present tense = continually) to one another, so that you may not do (present tense = continually) the things that you please. But if you are LED BY THE SPIRIT, you are NOT UNDER THE LAW." (See notes on Galatians 5:16; 5:17; 5:18) (**Ed**: Paul emphasizes that a godly life is NOT lived **under** rules and regulations and lists of do's and don't's [the Law] but is a life led by the Spirit. Note carefully the Greek word for "**under**" is **hupo** which in context means not simply to be "beneath" the Law but to be totally under the power, authority, and control of the Law! Be careful when you begin to try to obey a list of rules and regulations. We can even fall into the trap of legalistically doing "good things". E.g., we establish a "Quiet Time" and one morning miss it and go to work thinking God won't bless me today because I didn't have my "Quiet Time"! That's legalism even in good things. It's subtle beloved and we need to remain on the alert so that we don't place ourselves back up under the Law in any shape, fashion or form!)

This is the clearest picture of what Paul is trying to say in Ro8:14. You say I want to put to death the deeds of body...Sin is controlling my life. How do I do it? You put yourself in the presence of God, the Spirit Who lives within you. You get into His Word. And you let Him rule & reign - you do whatever He says. Wayne tells about the little sign he had in his study "YES, LORD." And that settles it. It's yea, but...So the Lord speaks and He says "Wayne...don't watch that program." And Wayne says "Yes, but..."



Look out. Our answer needs to be "Yes" to the Spirit leading us. Just say "Yes" to what the Spirit of God says to your heart and you develop that SENSITIVITY as you walk with Him.

**Romans 8:15** 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 !" (NASB: Lockman)

**Greek:** ou gar elabete (2PAAI) pneuma douleias palin eis phobon. alla elabete (2PAAI) pneuma huiiothesias. en o krazomen. (1PPAI) Abba o pater;

**Amplified:** For [the Spirit which] you have now received [is] not a spirit of slavery to put you once more in bondage to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption [the Spirit producing sonship] in [the bliss of] which we cry, Abba (Father)! Father! (Amplified Bible - Lockman)

**NLT:** So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family--calling him "Father, dear Father." (NLT - Tyndale House)

**Phillips:** Nor are you meant to relapse into the old slavish attitude of fear - you have been adopted into the very family circle of God and you can say with a full heart, "Father, my Father". (Phillips: Touchstone)

**Wuest:** For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again with resulting fear, but you received the Spirit who places you as adult sons, by whom we cry out with deep emotion, Abba, [namely] Father. (Eerdmans Publishing - used by permission)

**Young's Literal:** for ye did not receive a spirit of bondage again for fear, but ye did receive a spirit of adoption in which we cry, 'Abba -- Father.'

**FOR YOU HAVE NOT RECEIVED A SPIRIT OF SLAVERY LEADING TO FEAR AGAIN:** ou gar elabete (2PAAI) pneuma douleias palin eis phobon:

- Ex 20:19; Nu 17:12; Lk 8:28,37; Jn 16:8; Acts 2:37; 16:29; 1Co 2:12; 2Ti 1:7; Heb 2:15; 12:18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24; Jas 2:19; 1Jn 4:18
- Romans 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**For (gar)** is a small word which is used over 7000x in Scripture and most often as a **term of explanation** especially when it is found at the beginning of a sentence. If you want to revolutionize your insights and discoveries of the rich treasures hidden in God's Word, then learn to **focus on for** (F.O.F.). Whenever you encounter for as term of explanation, "Stop! Look! And Listen!" (so to speak), asking your Teacher, the Spirit, to illuminate the text. One way is ask the question "What is the for explaining?" which will force you to slow down and ponder the passage, which will invariably force you to examine the preceding **context** to answer your question. As you begin to practice F.O.F. you will be in effect also beginning to engage in the blessed discipline of **Biblical Meditation!**

In short, here **"for"** is explaining our sonship and what role the Holy Spirit has in bring about our sonship.

**Leon Morris** agrees writing "This is the third verse in succession to be introduced by "for". As Paul elaborates on sonship to God, he uses a closely knit argument (The Epistle to the Romans: The Pillar New Testament Commentary)

The great expositor **Donald Barnhouse** focuses on **for** (undoubtedly a discipline which contributed to his excellence in expositing Scripture) writing that...

our text begins with the word **"for."** **This word is a hinge that ties the whole passage together.** We have been brought out of death and into life. We have been established in Christ as a new pivot around which all life is to revolve. When God raised our Lord from the dead He raised us up together with Him. Therefore we are debtors ... **because if we live after the flesh the Christian life will be defeat and not triumph** But the triumph is assured, because as many as are dominated by the Spirit of God (Ro 8:13), they are the sons of God (cf Gal 4:5, 6); because we have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. In the technique of motion pictures this would be called a "flash back." There have been motion pictures which began with the presentation of an old person and then, in order to give the reasons why the person was in certain circumstances, reverted to earlier scenes in life, a "flash back" to things that have gone before. That is exactly what the Holy Spirit does in the clause we are studying. For there was a time when God brought His chosen

people out of Egypt and put them into bondage under the law, and that spirit of bondage brought great fear to their hearts.

Our text states plainly that the believer in Christ is not to live in any such state of fear. We have received the life of Christ—the resurrection of our Lord—and thus we are to live in freedom from the fear that conscience inspires. The RSV renders our text, “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.” Is it not a great tragedy therefore, in the light of this great truth, that the church has been brought back under the law in so many cases? For whenever there is legalism there must, of necessity, be the spirit of bondage to fear. It is heart-rending to read the history of the church and to find the constant tendency to return to the bondage of the law. On the pages of the New Testament we discover that men followed Paul to tear down that which he was preaching. He would arrive in a community and proclaim the doctrine of grace. He would tell men that they could trust in Christ and know that all of their sins were removed, both those they had already committed and those that would be committed in future. For justification can mean nothing less than this, that a believer is received by God in the totality of his life span, and that he is instantly made accepted in the Beloved. (God’s Heirs: Romans 8:1–39)

**You have not received** - The word for “**not**” here signifies absolute negation! For this truth we thank God!

**Received** ([2983](#))(**lambano**) means to take or grasp. It can indicate both benevolent and hostile actions, and have as object either people or things; e.g. take a wife, collect taxes, accept a verdict, take a road, and figuratively take courage.

**Spurgeon** - We did receive the spirit of bondage once. We felt that we were under the law, and that the law cursed us. We felt its rigorous taxation, and that we could not meet it. Now that spirit has gone, and we have the spirit of freedom, the spirit of children, the spirit of adoption. I suppose that the apostle, when he thus spake and said “ye,” felt so much of the spirit of adoption in his own bosom that he could not talk of it as belonging to others alone. He was obliged to include it thus, and so he puts it, “Ye have received the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” He wanted to intimate that he himself also was a partaker of this blessed spirit. And woe to the preacher who can preach an adoption which he never enjoyed. Woe to any of us if we can teach to others concerning the spirit of sonship, but never feel it crying in our own souls. “Abba, Father.”

**Slavery** ([1397](#)) (**douleia** from **doulos** - see word study) means slavery, bondage, the condition of a slave, the opposite of freedom (see studies on this word group “free, freedom” = eleutheria, eleutheroo, eleutheros). **Douleia** describes that state of man in which he is prevented from freely possessing and enjoying his life, a state opposed to liberty. In the NT **douleia** is only used figuratively to describe a slavish spirit. The idea is that of an enslaved moral or spiritual condition characterized by fear of breaking rules and thus experiencing bondage and lack of freedom.

**Douleia** - 5x in 5v - Ro 8:15, Ro 8:21-note Gal 4:24, 5:1 (= those enslaved to the Law), Heb 2:15-note (= those enslaved to the fear of death)

**BDAG** says **douleia** is...

the state or condition of being held as chattel by another, slavery (the basic perspective of the ancient world that one can be owned by only one master is expressed Mt 6:24; Lk 16:13)

**Vine** writes that **douleia**

is used in Romans 8:21 of that condition of the Creation into which it was brought by the Fall of man, its appointed head, and in Ro 8:15 of that fallen condition of man himself which makes him dread God rather than love Him, and, in Hebrews 2:15, that makes him fear death

Paul has been discussing the **flesh**, so this must have reference to those who are in the **flesh** (unbelievers) who are enslaved to Sin and the Law and receive the wages of Sin which is death (a cause of fear)

**Paul** is saying in essence...

The Holy Spirit, whom you have received, does not produce a slavish and anxious state of mind, such as those experience who are under the law, but He produces the filial feelings of affection, reverence, and confidence and enables us, out of the fullness of our hearts, to call God our Father.

No matter how cleverly they may manage to mask or deny the reality of it, sinful men are **continually subject to fear** because they continually live in sin and are therefore continually under God’s judgment for Jesus declared that...

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe **has been judged already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (Jn 3:18)

The lost, unregenerate men of this present evil age (Gal 1:4) are governed by a slavish and anxious apprehension of God's righteous punishment (and ultimately fear of eternal death in the Lake of fire, albeit they have no concept of its true "horrors"! Mk 9:48). Slavery to **Sin** brings slavery to fear, and one of the great and gracious works of the Holy Spirit is to deliver God's children from both sets of shackles, setting the captives free (Lk 4:18, cp Col 1:13-note, Acts 26:18), for when the Son sets a man free, he is free indeed (Jn 8:36, 31, 32, Ro 8:2-note). All unconverted (unregenerate, not born again) men, whether Jews or Gentiles, are in this state of enslavement to their deepest, innermost (fully justifiable -2Ti 4:1-note, Jn 5:22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, Acts 10:42, 17:31, Ro 2:16) fears because they are all under the Law which kills (Ro 7:11-note). and the penalty for breaking that Law (which all do - cp Jas 2:10) is death (Ro 6:23-note), their ultimate enemy, which no amount of money or earthly power can avoid (cp Mk 8:34, 35, 36, Lk 12:16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, A certain rich man = Lk 16:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31).

Paul reminded Timothy that our heavenly Father

has not given us a **spirit of timidity** (fear = deilia [word study]), but of power (dunamis) and love (agape) and discipline (sophronismos) (2Ti 1:7-note).

John reminds believers of the truth that

there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love (1Jn 4:18).

**Spurgeon** - The spirit of bondage is the spirit of servants, not of sons; but that servitude is ended for us who are made free in Christ Jesus. We are no longer afraid of being called the children of God. We are not afraid of our own Father; we have a filial fear of him, but it is so mixed with love that there is no torment in it. Whether Jew or Gentile, we cry, "Abba, Father." You did receive it once (the spirit of slavery). You needed it. You were in sin, and it was well for you when sin became bondage to you. It was grievous, but it was salutary; but you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear.

#### See related discussions - Anxiety, Fear

- Anxiety (merimna)
- Anxious, be anxious (merimnao) word study
- Jesus' solution "Do not be worried" Mt 6:25ff
- Paul's Solution - Philippians 4:6; Philippians 4:7
- Peter's Solution - Cast your cares on God - 1 Peter 5:7
- Fear, How to Handle It
- Worry - What is it?

#### BUT YOU HAVE RECEIVED A SPIRIT OF ADOPTION AS SONS: alla elabete (2PAAI) pneuma huiiothesias:

- Ro 8:16; Isa 56:5; Jer 3:19; 1Co 2:12; Ga 4:5, 6, 7; Ep 1:5,11, 12, 13, 14
- [Dictionary articles on Adoption - Smith's, ISBE](#)
- Romans 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

**Sons** (not slaves) - Gal 4:5 Ep 1:5-note, not **slaves** Gal 4:7. **Paul** explains in the next verse that...

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are **children of God** (Ro 8:16-note)

**Warren Wiersbe** comments that...

To live **in the flesh** or **under law** (and to put yourself under law is to move toward living in the flesh) leads to **bondage**; but the Spirit leads us into a glorious life of liberty in Christ. **Liberty** (see word study on eleutheria = liberty) to the believer **never** means freedom to do as he or she pleases, for that is the worst kind of slavery! Rather, Christian liberty in the Spirit is freedom from law and the flesh so that we can please God and become what He wants us to become.

**Adoption** in the NT does not mean what it typically means today, the taking of a child into a family to be a legal member of the family. The literal meaning of the Greek word is "**son-placing**" —the taking of a minor (whether in the family or outside) and making him or her the rightful heir. Every believer is a child of God by birth (**Ed**: spiritual birth, Jn 3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8) and an heir of God through adoption (cp heir in Ro 4:13, 14-note, Ro 8:17-note, Gal 3:29, 4:1, 7, 30, Ep 3:6-note, Titus 3:7-note, He 6:17-note, He 11:7-note, He 11:9-note, Jas 2:5, 1Pe 3:7-note). In fact, we are joint-heirs with Christ, so that He cannot receive His inheritance in glory until

we are there to share it with Him. Thank God, the believer has no obligation to the flesh, to feed it, pamper it, obey it. Instead, we must "put to death" (mortify) the deeds of the flesh by the power of the Spirit (Ro 8:13-note, Col 3:9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15-see notes) and allow the Spirit to direct our daily lives. ([Wiersbe, W. W. Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament. Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books](#))

**Adoption as sons (5206) (huiiothesia [word study] from huios = son + titheimi = place) literally means "to place one as a son". Huiiothesia thus speaks of adoption or being placed in a position and rights as one's own child. It means to formally and legally declare that someone who is not one's own child is henceforth to be treated and cared for as one's own child, including complete rights of inheritance.**

**Adoption** bears a relationship to justification in that it is declarative and forensic (inasmuch as it is a legal term). **Adoption** bestows an objective standing, even as does **justification** for like justification, adoption represents essentially a legal pronouncement that never needs to be repeated. Once we are adopted as sons, our adoption is permanently valid.

Also, like **justification**, **adoption** rests on the loving purpose and grace of God, not on any meritorious works of the one adopted. Paul writes that God the Father...

predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Ep 1:5-note)

Though the term **adoption** is used of Israel in relation to God (Ro 9:4-note, Hos 11:1), it is doubtful that adoption was practiced in OT days. Much more likely is the interpretation that Paul was drawing on the background of Roman law both here and in Galatians 4:5. The readers of both of these epistles, many of whom were Roman citizens, would be familiar with legal implications of adoption in the Roman Empire.

**Huiiothesia** is not so much a word of relationship as of position. In regeneration a Christian receives the nature of a child of God; in adoption he receives the position of a son of God. Every Christian obtains the place of a child and the right to be called a son the moment he believes (Gal 3:25, 26 4:6 1Jn 3:1-note, 1Jn 3:2-note). The indwelling Spirit gives the realization of this in the Christian's present experience (Gal 4:6) but the full manifestation of his sonship awaits the resurrection, change, and translation of saints, "the redemption of the body" (Ro 8:23-note, Ep 1:14-note, 1Th 4:14, 15, 16, 17-note).

A formal definition Of what **adoption** means is found in the Westminster Confession (chapter twelve):

All those that are justified, God vouchsafeth, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption: by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God; have His name put upon them, receive the Spirit of adoption; have access to the throne of grace with boldness; are enabled to cry, Abba, Father; are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him, as by a father; yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

**Greg Ogden** - As adopted children we can enjoy the same favor that Jesus has with the Father. We too are the apple of God's eye, the pleasure of his love, the delight of his focus. And if we didn't get all that we wanted or needed in our human fathers, we are invited even more deeply into the pleasure that the Father of heaven and earth takes in his Son, and us. We have been included in the family and hear the Father say, "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." We now have the Father we always needed and wanted. (Discipleship Essentials-A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ)

**Sinclair Ferguson** rightly says that...

Understanding adoption should mean that our own sense of the great goodness and love of God is immeasurably enriched.

**John Murray** writes that...

Adoption, as the term clearly implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege.

**Marvin Vincent** quotes a Mr. Merivale,

The process of legal adoption by which the chosen heir became entitled not only to the reversion of the property but to the civil status, to the burdens as well as the rights of the adopter—became, as it were, his other self, one with him ... this too is a Roman principle, peculiar at this time to the Romans, unknown, I believe, to the Greeks, unknown, to all appearance, to the Jews... We have but a faint conception of the force with which such an illustration would speak to one familiar with the Roman practice; how it would serve to

impress upon him the assurance that the adopted son of God becomes, in a peculiar and intimate sense, one with the heavenly Father.

## John Piper

There are dozens of children and young people and adults in this church who have been legally adopted. You are all loved by your parents with a deep, true, unshakable love just as much or more than if you had been born into your family. And that is the way it is with God. This reality of adoption is a massive, firm, legal reality. And it is a deep, strong, full-hearted emotional reality. When the Holy Spirit is called in Ro 8:15 the **Spirit of adoption** the meaning is the Spirit confirms and makes real to you this great legal transaction of adoption. If you have trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior and Treasure, then you are adopted. John 1:12,

To all who did receive him, who believed in His name, He gave the right (authority) to become **children of God**.

If you receive Christ, you are adopted...

The Spirit is poured out into our hearts to confirm and make real our adoption. How does he do that according to Ro 8:15? He does it by replacing the fear of a slave toward a master with the love of a son toward a father. "You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" He is contrasting the fear of a slave with the affection of a son. The work of the Holy Spirit in our lives is to change our slavish fears toward God into confident, happy, peaceful affection for God as our father.

Now relate that to the leading of the Spirit in Ro 8:14. This is the other question I said Paul is answering in Ro 8:15: How does the Spirit lead? "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." How does he lead? How does he move us and enable us to put to death the deeds of the body – to kill sin? Answer: "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons." The Spirit does not lead by stirring up slavish fear. He leads by stirring up family affection. He does not get you to kill sin by making you a slave who acts out of fear. But by making you a son who acts out of faith and affection...

The Spirit brings about a response in our hearts to the love of God that cries out, "Abba! Father!" The witness of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God is not a testimony to a neutral heart with no affection for God's fatherly love so that your neutral heart can draw the logical conclusion that it is a child of God and then try to muster up some appropriate affections. That is not the picture. No. The witness of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God is the creation in you of affections for God. The testimony of the Holy Spirit IS the cry, "Abba! Father!"

And the reason Paul uses the word "cry" and the Aramaic word "Abba" is because both of them point to deep, affectionate, personal, authentic experience of God's fatherly love. He didn't say that the testimony of the Spirit was that we affirm doctrinally that God is father. The devil knows that doctrine. Doctrinal affirmations, as important as they are, don't make children. What he said was that the testimony of the Spirit that we are God's children is that from our hearts there rises an irrepressible cry – a cry, not a mere statement, a cry: "Abba! Father!"

We don't infer logically the fatherhood of God from the testimony of the Spirit. We enjoy emotionally the Fatherhood of God by the testimony of the Spirit. The testimony of the Spirit is not a premise from which we deduce that we are children of God; it is a power by which we delight in being the children of God.

Don't Wait for a Whisper – Look to Jesus!

If you want to know that you are a child of God, you don't put your ear to the Holy Spirit and wait for a whisper; put your ear to the gospel and your eye to the cross of Christ and you pray that the Holy Spirit would enable you to see it and savor it for what it really is. Romans 5:8, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

The testimony of the Spirit is that when we look at cross we cry, "Jesus, you are my Lord!" (1 Corinthians 12:3), and "God, you are my Father!" So look to Christ! Look to Christ! ([The Spirit-Led Are the Sons of God](#))

## C H Spurgeon...

We are regenerated, by the Holy Spirit, and so receive the nature of children; and that nature, which is given by him, he continually prompts, and excites, and develops, and matures; so that we receive day by day more

and more of the childlike spirit. Now, beloved, this may not seem to you to be of very great importance at first sight; but it is so; for the church is never happy except as all her members walk as dear children towards God. Sometimes the spirit of slaves creeps over us: we begin to talk of the service of God as though it were heavy and burdensome, and are discontented if we do not receive present wages and visible success, just as servants do when they are not suited; but the spirit of adoption works for love, without any hope of reward, and it is satisfied with the sweet fact of being in the Father's house, and doing the Father's will. This spirit gives peace, rest, joy, boldness, and holy familiarity with God. A man who never received the spirit of a child towards God does not know the bliss of the Christian life; he misses its flower, its savor, its excellence, and I should not wonder if the service of Christ should be a weariness to him because he has never yet got to the sweet things, and does not enjoy the green pastures, wherein the Good Shepherd makes his sheep to feed and to lie down. But when the Spirit of God makes us feel that we are sons, and we live in the house of God to go no more out for ever, then the service of God is sweet and easy, and we accept the delay of apparent success as a part of the trial we are called to bear.

Now, mark you, this will have a great effect upon the outside world. A body of professors performing religion as a task, groaning along the ways of godliness with faces full of misery, like slaves who dread the lash, can have but small effect upon the sinners around them. They say, "These people serve, no doubt, a hard master, and they are denying themselves this and that; why should we be like them?" But bring me a church made up of children of God, a company of men and women whose faces shine with their heavenly Father's smile, who are accustomed to take their cares and cast them on their Father as children should, who know they are accepted and beloved, and are perfectly content with the great Father's will; put them down in the midst of a company of ungodly ones, and I will warrant you they will begin to envy them their peace and joy. Thus happy saints become most efficient operators upon the minds of the unsaved. O blessed Spirit of God! let us all now feel that we are the children of the great Father, and let our childlike love be warm this morning; so shall we be fit to go forth and proclaim the Lord's love to the prodigals who are in the far-off land among the swine.

**F. F. Bruce** says that...

The term "adoption" may smack somewhat of artificiality in our ears; but in the first century A.D. an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature and might well enjoy the father's affection more fully and reproduce the father's character more worthily.

**Matthew Henry**

The Spirit of adoption works in the children of God a filial love to God as a Father, a delight in him, and a dependence upon him, as a Father. A sanctified soul bears the image of God, as the child bears the image of the father. Whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Praying is here called crying, which is not only an earnest, but a natural expression of desire children that cannot speak vent their desires by crying. Now, the Spirit teaches us in prayer to come to God as a Father, with a holy humble confidence, emboldening the soul in that duty. Abba, Father. Abba is a Syriac word signifying father or my father pater, a Greek word and why both, Abba, Father? Because Christ said so in prayer (Mark 14:36), Abba, Father: and we have received the Spirit of the Son. It denotes an affectionate endearing importunity, and a believing stress laid upon the relation. Little children, begging of their parents, can say little but Father, Father, and that is rhetoric enough. It also denotes that the adoption is common both to Jews and Gentiles: the Jews call him Abba in their language, the Greeks may call him pater in their language for in Christ Jesus there is neither Greek nor Jew. ([Romans 8-14](#))

**William Barclay** has a detailed discussion of **adoption** in Paul's day writing that...

Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Roman *patria potestas*. This was the father's power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days was actually the power of life and death. In regard to his father, a Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one patria potestas to another. There were two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio*, and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the patria potestas was held to be broken. There followed a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to the praetor, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his patria



potestas. When all this was completed, the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and an impressive step. But it is the consequences of adoption which are most significant for the picture that is in Paul's mind. There were four main ones.

(i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father.

(ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them.

(iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do.

(iv) In the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father. Roman history provides an outstanding case of how completely this was held to be true. ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible](#))

**Puritan Stephen Charnock** writes that...

Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration the nature of sons.

**Puritan Thomas Watson** writes that...

**Adoption** is a greater mercy than Adam had in paradise... God has made his children, by **adoption**, nearer to himself than the angels. The angels are the friends of Christ; believers are his members... Since God has a Son of his own, and such a Son, how wonderful God's love in **adopting** us! We needed a Father, but He did not need sons.

**How binding was "adoption" in Rome?** Nero's father died when he was about 3 years old. After Caligula confiscated their family wealth, he and his mother found themselves quite poor for a time. Things changed dramatically when Agrippina married her uncle, the emperor Claudius. That marriage was the means of Nero's rise to power. Agrippina managed to get Nero adopted not only as a son of Claudius, but the heir to the throne before Claudius' actual sons. As believers adopted into God's family as God's children (Jn 1:12 Ro 8:16) we are "heirs of God & fellow heirs with Christ" (Ro 8:17).

**A C Gaebelein** commenting on the Holy Spirit in Ro 8:14-16...

Here the Spirit of adoption, of Sonship is made known. They are the sons of God, who are led by the Spirit. The Spirit of God is in the believer as a Spirit of adoption. We have not received a spirit of bondage to be again in fear, as it was with the Old Testament believers, but a spirit that answers to our sonship in Christ, and by that Spirit we cry, Abba, Father. He is called a Spirit of adoption because He produces in the believer the reality of divine Sonship as well as all which appertains to this relation- ship. The Holy Spirit does not make believers sons, but He is given to them, and is in the believer as the Spirit of sonship, because they are sons. **It must be noted that believers are spoken of as children of God and also as sons of God. In our relationship we are children, born into the family of God; in our position and future glory we are sons.**

Indwelling the believer the Holy Spirit bears witness "with our spirit, that we are the children of God." The witness of the Spirit is in the Word of God, and because the believer has accepted His witness as to redemption he knows therefore that God is His Father, and, being born again, that he is in the family of God. He produces in the believer the consciousness of being a child of God, as well as the affections of a child. "We have this testimony in our hearts in our relationship with God; but the Holy Spirit Himself, as distinct from us, bears this testimony to those in whom He dwells. The true believer knows that he recognizes in his heart God as his Father, but He also knows that the Holy Spirit bears the same testimony to him. That which is founded on the Word is realized and verified in the heart." The witness of the Spirit is more than "a good feeling," it is the deep consciousness produced by believing the Word in the power of the Spirit of God that we are the children of God. (The Holy Spirit in the New Testament)

**William E Brown** writes that...

The present reality of the believer's **adoption** into the family of God is release from the slavery of sin and the law and a new position as a free heir of God. Entering into salvation brings the rights and privileges of free sonship: "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'" (Ro 8:15). Paul tells the Galatians that Christians were redeemed from the law so that they might receive adoption as sons. As a result the Holy Spirit comes into the believer's heart crying, "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:5). The intimacy of a relationship with God the Father in contrast to the ownership of slavery is a remarkable feature of salvation.



Like many aspects of salvation, there is an eschatological component of adoption. Believers "wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Ro 8:23-note). The full revelation of the believer's adoption is freedom from the corruption present in the world. Being a member of God's family includes the ultimate privilege of being like him (1Jn 3:2-note) and being conformed to the glorious body of Christ (Php 3:21-note). This is part of the promised inheritance for all God's children (Ro 8:16, 17-note). ([Adoption - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#))

## NAVE'S TOPIC ADOPTION

**ADOPTION.** Ge 15:3.

**Of Children**

**Instances of:**

**Of Joseph's sons,** Gen. 48:5, 14, 16, 22.

**Of Moses,** Ex. 2:5-10; Acts 7:21; Heb. 11:24.

**Of Esther,** Esth. 2:7.

**Spiritual**

Ex 4:22, 23; Nu 6:27 Dt 14:1; 26:18; 27:9; 28:10; 32:5, 6 2Chr. 7:14; Isa. 43:7; 2Sa 7:14; 1Chr. 22:10,28:6. Pr 14:26; Isa 8:18; 43:6; 63:16, 8; Jer 3:19; 31:9, 20; Hos 1:9, 10; 11:1;

Mt. 5:9, 45; Mt 13:43; Lk 6:35; Jn 1:12, 13; 11:52; Acts 15:17; Ro 8:14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, 29; 9:8, 26; Heb 1:5. 2Co 6:17, 18; Gal. 3:26, 29; 4:5, 6, 7; Eph. 1:5; 2:19; 3:6, 15; Phil. 2:15; Heb. 2:10, 11, 13; 12:6, 7, 9; 1Jn 3:1, 2, 10; 4:4; Rev 21:7

**Typified**

**in Israel,** Ex 4:22; Hos 11:1; Ro 9:4.

**BY WHICH WE CRY OUT ABBA! FATHER:** en o krazomen (1PPAI) abba o pater:

- Mark 14:36; Luke 11:2; 22:42; John 20:17
- Romans 8 Resources - Multiple Sermons and Commentaries

### True believers are impelled to cry out Abba! Father!

**By which we cry out** - That is, on the basis of the incredible truth that sinners otherwise destined for eternal separation from God (see 2Th 1:7, 8, 9, 10), have now been brought near (Ep 2:13-note) by the blood of the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 1Pe 1:18, 19-note), by grace through faith in Christ's full atoning, substitutionary sacrifice (Ep 2:8, 9-note). God's **Holy Spirit** now "fills" our lungs (spiritually speaking [Ep 5:18-note], as well as physically) with the air we breath and which allows us to exclaim **Abba! Father!**, words we heretofore had no right or claim to utter. Amazing, holy love, how can it be that God has saved such wretches as we!

**Moule** on "we cry" - Whether in supplication, or in praise. Observe the change again to the first person, suggesting St Paul's sense of the holy community of the family of God. (ibid)

**Cry** (2896) (**krazo**) refers to a loud cry or vociferation, and is a strong word expressing deep emotion. **Krazo** is one of those [onomatopoeic](#) words, the very pronunciation of which imitates the hoarse cry of the raven ([listen](#)), and can be an inarticulate and brutish sound or an exclamation of fear or pain. Abbott-Smith says "generally used of inarticulate cries, *to scream, cry out* (Aesch., etc.)" It is used of the cry of an animal, the barking of a dog and two men in a quarrel, trying to bawl each other down (so Aristophanes, Knights, 1017) "The prophet in awful earnestness, and as with a scream of anguish, cries over Israel' (Morison)" **Krazō** was also a technical, rabbinic term to refer to the loud summons of a prophet, needing to be heard. In Lk 18:39 the blind beggar cried "to cry clamorously; to scream or shriek." (You can almost hear him shrieking! He is motivated because he is blind and thinks this Man might help him see!)

Matthew 8:29 And they (demons Jesus had just called out) **cried** out, saying, "What business do we have with each other, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?"

- See page 408 for 3 page discussion of krazo [New International Dictionary Of New Testament Theology](#)

**Krazo** - 55x in 54v - - cried(20), cries(2), cry(5), crying(12), screaming(1), screams(1), shout(1), shouted(4), shouting(8). Mt 8:29; 9:27; 14:26, 30; 15:22f; 20:30f; 21:9, 15; 27:23, 50; Mark 3:11; 5:5, 7; 9:24, 26; 10:47f; 11:9; 15:13f; Luke 9:39; 18:39; 19:40; John 1:15; 7:28, 37; 12:44; Acts 7:57, 60; 14:14; 16:17; 19:28, 32, 34; 21:28, 36; 23:6; 24:21; Rom 8:15; 9:27; Gal 4:6; Jas 5:4; Rev 6:10; 7:2, 10; 10:3; 12:2; 14:15; 18:2, 18f; 19:17.

**Krazo** - 88v in the Septuagint - Gen 41:55; Ex 5:8; 22:23; 32:17; Num 11:2; Josh 6:16; Jdg 1:14; 3:9, 15; 4:3; 18:24; 2 Sam 13:19; 19:4, 28; Job 6:5; 19:7; 30:20, 28; 34:20; 35:9, 12; 38:41; Ps 3:4; 4:3; 17:6; 18:6, 41; 22:2, 5, 24; 27:7; 28:1; 30:2, 8; 31:22; 32:3; 34:6, 17; 55:16; 57:2; 61:2; 65:13; 66:17; 69:3; 77:1; 86:3, 7; 88:1, 9, 13; 107:6, 13, 19, 28; 119:145ff; 120:1; 130:1; 141:1; 142:1, 5; Isa 6:3; 14:31; 15:4; 19:20; 26:17; 31:4; 42:2; 65:14, 24; Jer 4:5; 11:11f; 22:20; 25:34; 33:3; 47:2; 48:3, 20; 49:3; Lam 3:8; Ezek 27:30; Hos 8:2; Joel 1:14; Mic 3:4; Hab 1:2; Zech 7:13

One sign of a child is that he or she knows their earthly father (tragically this maxim is far from true in post-Christian America [circa 2009] where out of wedlock childbirths are the rule rather than the exception and are ravaging the nation, leaving many children without "on site" fathers! I understand for **my own testimony** is integrally intertwined with the truth of an "off site", unknown father!) One sign of the child of God is that he or she knows their heavenly Father.

## ABBA! FATHER!

### Spurgeon...

Does your spirit cry in that way to-night? Even if you be in the dark, yet if you cry for your Father, you will soon be in the light. There is no need to be distressed with any form of doubt so long as the Spirit makes this continual breathing, "Abba, Father, show thyself to me. Do what thou wilt to me. Let me taste thy love. Let me at least bow under thy hand."

**Abba** ([0005 - click to listen to pronunciation accentuating second syllable](#)) (**Abba**) is transliterated as Abba into English from the corresponding Aramaic word which was used in the everyday language of families as a term addressing one's father. Children, as well as adult sons and daughters, used **Abba** when speaking to their fathers. And so **Abba** conveys a warm, intimate sense just as with our expression "Dear father."

- [Dictionary Articles on "Abba"](#)

**Abba** is used only 3 times in Scriptures and each use is the identical phrase "Abba! Father!" which in Greek is "abba ho pater", literally "Abba, the Father", so that "the Father" serves to "translate" the Aramaic word "Abba" to any readers unable to understand Aramaic. In addition, each use is in the context of calling on God in prayer.

The combined use of the Aramaic **Abba** and Greek means something like "dear Father", "Daddy" "Papa." Remember that in the Roman Empire of the first century, adopted sons enjoyed the same privileges as natural-born sons. So, instead of cowering in slave-like fear, all sons and daughters by the new birth can confidently, boldly (and yet humbly) approach God in an intimate way, reverentially calling Him **Abba, Father**. Hallelujah! Amazing grace indeed!

### Spurgeon

Oh, blessed, blessed state of heart to feel that now we are born into the family of God, and that the choice word which no slave might ever pronounce may now be pronounced by us, "Abba"! It is a child's word, such as a little child utters when first he opens his mouth to speak, and it runs the same both backwards and forwards, —AB-BA. Oh to have a childlike spirit that, in whatever state of heart I am, I may still be able to say, in the accents even of spiritual infancy, "Abba, Father"!

### Scott Grant

The Spirit makes Jesus' prayer our prayer, enabling us to address God intimately and trustingly, even in dire circumstances. This cry is the Spirit's answer to the cry of Paul, speaking for conflicted Israel as a whole under the law in Romans 7:24, "Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?" Answer: Christ, who clears the way for the Spirit, who inspires the cry of free sons, not frustrated slaves. In this way, by

enabling and inspiring us to connect with God as our Father, the Spirit witnesses to us that we are children of God. As children of God, we cry "Abba," not always, of course, using that word, but with a sense that we are sons and daughters of God. ([Sermon](#))

## God the Father of Believers

God is the Father of all who believe in Christ in a special sense not shared by unbelievers. God is called their Father because they have a new standing before Him. To be sure all unbelievers are the offspring of God because He created them (Acts 17:28, 29), they do not have the standing as **sons of God**. Their standing is rather that of condemned **sinners before God** the Judge (John 3:18; Rev 20:11ff-[note](#)). When we believe in Christ as Savior, our estate is wonderfully changed from grim condemnation to privileged sonship. This new standing grants to all believers the legal right and spiritual privileges of divine sonship: "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Ro 8:17-note). God is the Father of believers also in the sense that He gives them new life through the new birth by the Spirit (John 3:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8). Their new relationship is a family relationship and by analogy conveys many of the same realities that exist between an earthly father and his offspring -- birth of the child (John 3:3); partaking of the father's nature (2Pet 1:4-note), the father's care for the child (Mt 6:32, 33-note; Mt 7:9, 10, 11-note) and the father's discipline of the child (Heb 12:5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11-note). Furthermore, this new spiritual family brings into our live new brothers and sisters (Heb 13:1 note). I was just talking with a worker on my house, and within minutes it became clear that he, though a man of color, was more my brother, than my own physical half-brother, who is not saved. Amazing grace breaks down all barriers (or it should) in God's family.

### Spurgeon

According to ancient traditions no slave might say, "Abba, Father," and according to the truth as it is in Jesus none but a man who is really a child of God, and has received the adoption, can truly say, "Abba, Father." This day my heart desires for every one of you, my brethren, that because Christ has been born into the world you may at once come of age, and may at this hour confidently say, "Abba, Father." The great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, is my Father, and I dare avow it without fear that he will disown the kindred. The Thunderer, the ruler of the stormy sea, is my Father, and notwithstanding the terror of his power I draw near to him in love. He who is the Destroyer, who says, "Return, ye children of men," is my Father, and I am not alarmed at the thought that he will call me to himself in due time. My God, thou who shalt call the multitudes of the slain from their graves to live, I look forward with joy to the hour when thou shalt call and I shall answer thee. Do what thou wilt with me, thou art my Father. Smile on me; I will smile back and say, "My Father." Chasten me, and as I weep I will cry, "My Father." This shall make everything work good to me, be it never so hard to bear. If thou art my Father all is well to all eternity. Bitterness is sweet, and death itself is life, since thou art my Father, Oh, trip ye merrily home, ye children of the living God, saying each one within himself, "I have it, I have it. I have that which cherubim before the throne have never gained; I have relationship with God of the nearest and the dearest kind, and my spirit for her music hath this word, 'Abba, Father; Abba, Father.' " ([The great birthday and our coming of age](#))

**Barnhouse** commented that...

"A tree is known by its fruits. (**Ed:** Cp "A son is known by his daily walk.") This is an infallible criterion, both in the natural and spiritual realm. 'Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit' (Mt. 7:17). The test for love of Christ is obedience to His commandment. Profession is proved or disproved by the daily walk. If a man has no love for spiritual things, he is devoid of a spiritual nature. If a man is in an utterly prayerless state, **he has not received the spirit of adoption whereby the saved cries 'Abba, Father.'** If a man is thoroughly wrapped up in the things of this world, then his eyes must be closed to the glories of Heaven, 'For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also' (Mt. 6:21). If a man prefers the company of worldlings to that of God's people, then he is a worldling himself. If a man lives to please self rather than God, he is yet dead in trespasses and sin. (God's Freedom: Romans 6:1-7:25)

**Wayne Barber** explains that...

The family tree of Adam had nothing but sinners and the destiny of each of them was eternal separation from God (2Th 1:9). But we as believers in Christ have a brand new family tree and it begins at the Cross where Christ died (**Ed:** And then rose as the first fruits from the dead - see 1Co 15:20, 21, 22) . Now that we as believers are **in Christ** (see **in Christ** and **in Christ Jesus** and **in Christ - pt 2**), we look back at the Cross and turn and look ahead and all you can see is eternal life and living with Him - what a marvelous family God has birthed us into! He took us out of the family of Adam (**Ed:** cp our state in Adam = Eph 2:1-note) and placed us into the family of God, into Christ.

**Do you know beyond a shadow of doubt that you are a part of the family of God?** One way you can tell is that this new relationship conveys a **new disposition**. Paul says we have not (ou = absolute negative = no possibility) received a **spirit of slavery**. **Spirit** in this context is spirit with a "small s" and some people take this to be "demonic". Absolutely no way! The word **spirit** in context means disposition, mindset or temperament. For example in Romans 11:8 (note) Paul says God gave Israel a

**spirit of stupor**, which speaks of an attitude or a disposition, something so deep on the inside of one's being that it translates outward in one's attitude and disposition.

**In Adam** we were subject to **fear** (phobos [word study]), where phobos is a word used for lost people. What do they fear? They say they don't fear God (**Ed**: And in a sense that it affects their actions or behavior they don't according to Ro 3:18) but we know that their "fearlessness" is a façade and that there is a sense in which all men do fear God. Why? Because they fear death and if you fear death you fear God because you know there is something on the other side of death that you don't understand.

Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil and might deliver those who through FEAR OF DEATH were subject to slavery all their lives. (Heb 2:14, 15-note)

Death brings separation and is the end of everything that they hope for and want. In Christ we are no longer slaves from a spirit of fear but out of a spirit of love (cp 2Co 5:14). There is a new kind of fear that manifest itself in reverential awe and devotion (cp 1Pe 1:17-note, Job 1:1). Now you are a **child of God** and a child does not fear his parent (usually this is true). There is a new disposition toward God we never had before. We trust Him.

The phrase "**adoption as sons**" is one word in Greek (huios = sons) and (tithemi = to place). **Son** means fully grown and mature with full privileges in the family. All of the privileges and sonship are in Christ Jesus. Never separate **privilege** and **position** from the Lord Jesus Christ for we are nothing apart from Him (cp Jn 15:5, Col 3:4-note). When we surrender to Him out of a love relationship, we enjoy the Son's privileges to the fullest! (cp Ro 8:17)

**Abba** is Aramaic and comes from the first word that a little child ever says...like our English "Da Da". The disposition of fear of punishment is gone and replaced by a reverential awe. And now our spirit can cry out "Abba...Father...I need help. Daddy...I'm going through a difficult time." This is a beautiful picture for every son (and daughter) of God. This truth ought to affect your attitude (and acceptance) regarding whatever the Lord is allowing to transpire in your life (cp 1Th 5:18-note, Jas 1:2, 3-note). You are a child of God and He is control of everything (cp El Elyon: Most High God - Sovereign Over All) that you are experiencing... and you can cry out to Him (cp Heb 2:18-note, Heb 4:16-note) and run to Him and He is always there (Heb 13:5-note) (**Romans 8:12-17: Rights of the Holy Spirit**)

**Octavius Winslow** on "**The Spirit of Adoption**"...

"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." Romans 8:15

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." Romans 8:15

So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him "Father, dear Father." Romans 8:15

**It is most distinctly affirmed in this passage, that the children of God are emancipated from the spirit of bondage- the present and mournful condition of all the unregenerate.**

The question here arises, what is the spirit of bondage of which the Apostle speaks? It exhibits itself in various forms, yet, essentially, it is the same spirit. The world, for example, holds in cruel bondage all its devotees. It enslaves the intellect by its opinions, the heart by its pleasures, the imagination by its promises, the soul by its religion- leading it a willing captive, a victim garlanded for the sacrifice. They are described as "**walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.**" But it is the moral law- the spirit of bondage which genders fear- to which the passage particularly refers. Its commands are exceedingly broad, and the obedience upon which it insists unqualifiedly perfect; and yet, with all the breadth of the precept, and the rigidity of the requirement, it offers **no helping hand**.

It shows a man his sin, but not his pardon.

It teaches him his weakness, but tells him not where his great strength lies.

It thunders in his ear his misery and condemnation, but whispers not a word of mercy and of hope.

Emancipated, as the justified believer really is, from the condemning power of this law, yet, alas! how much of its bondage spirit does he still retain! How few of the sons of God realize the possession and largeness of their birthright! How few rise to the dimity and the privilege of their adoption! How few see their completeness in Christ Jesus, and read the sentence of their pardon written in the heart's blood of Immanuel! How few walk in a large place, and by the sunny joyousness and lofty aspirations of their spirit,

evidence that they have **"not received the spirit of bondage again to fear!"**

**"But you have received the Spirit of adoption."** The Spirit of adoption is the same as the Spirit of God. There are two essential features which identify him as such.

**The first is, he imparts the nature of the Father to all the children of the family** In this there is a wide difference between a human and a Divine adoption. Man can only confer his name and his inheritance upon the child he adopts. But in the adoption of God, to the name and inheritance of God is added the Divine nature imparted in regeneration; so that, in the words of our Lord, we become manifestly the "children of our Father who is in heaven."

**The second feature is- having begotten the nature of the Father, he then breathes the spirit of the child into the heart** He inspires a filial love. The love which glows in the believer's heart is the affection of a child to its parent. It is not a servile bondage, but a filial and free spirit. Oh, sweet and holy emotion! How tender and confiding, how clinging and childlike is it! Such ought to be our love to God. He is our Father- we are his children. Why should not our love to him be marked by more of the exquisite tenderness, and the unquestioning confidence, and the calm repose of a child reclining upon a parent's breast?

**A childlike fear of God is another inspiration of the Spirit of adoption** Love and fear are twin graces in the Christian character. The Spirit of God is the Author of both; and both dwell together and co-operate in the same renewed heart. It is not the dread of the servant, but the holy trembling of the child, of which we speak. It is a filial, loving, reverential fear.

**A childlike trust in God also springs from the Spirit of adoption** The trust of a child is implicit, affectionate, and unquestioning. Upon whose counsel may he so safely rely, in whose affection may he so fully confide, upon whose fidelity may he so confidently trust, as a parent's? God is your Father, O child of a divine adoption, of a heavenly birth! Let your trust in him be the result of the relationship you sustain. It admits you to the closest intimacy, and invites you to the most perfect confidence. You have not a need, nor an anxiety, nor a grief which is not all his own. His adoption of your person- an act of his spontaneous and most free grace- pledged him to transfer all your individual interests to himself.

**To these we must add a filial obedience: "If you love me, keep my commandments."** (Jn 14:15) Obedience, whether to the Savior's precept, or to the Father's law, is the test of love; and love is the spring of obedience. **"All that the Lord God has spoken to us will we do,"** is the language of that heart where the Spirit of adoption dwells (**Ed:** Unfortunately Israel's expression of willingness to obey in Ex 24:3, 24:7 was their intention but not their practice). Such are some of the features of adoption.

**"Whereby we cry, Abba, Father."** The Apostle employs in the original two different languages. It may not be improper to infer, that in using both the Syriac and the Greek form- the one being familiar to the Jew, and the other to the Gentile- he would denote that both the Christian Jew and the believing Gentile were children of one family, and were alike privileged to approach God as a Father. Christ, our peace, has broken down the middle wall of partition that was between them; and now, at the same mercy-seat, the Christian Jew and the believing Gentile, both one in Christ Jesus, meet, as rays of light converge and blend in one common center- at the feet of their reconciled Father. The expressions, too, set forth the peculiarity and intensity of the affection. Literally, "Abba, Father," signifies "My Father." No bond-servant was permitted thus to address the master of the family; it was a privilege peculiar and sacred to the child. And when our blessed Lord would teach his disciples to pray, he led them to the mercy-seat, and sealed these precious words upon their lips- "Our Father, who is in heaven." And after his resurrection, with increased emphasis and intensity did he give utterance to the same truth. Previously to his death his words were, "go to the Father." But when he came back from the grave, every truth he had before enunciated seemed quickened as with new life. How tender and touching were his words- "I ascend unto my Father, and to your Father; to my God, and to your God." No longer a bond-slave, but a son, oh, claim the dignity and privilege of your birthright! Approach God as your Father.

**"Abba, Father!"** How tender the relation! how intense the affection! what power it imparts to prayer! What may you not ask, and what can God refuse, with "Abba, Father" breathing in lowliness and love from your lips? Remember, it is an inalienable, unchangeable relation. Never, in any instance, or under any circumstance the most aggravated, does God forget it. He is as much our Father when he chastises, as when he approves; as much so when he frowns, as when he smiles; as much so when he brims the cup of adversity, as when he bids us drink the cup of salvation. Behold the touching display of it in his gracious restorings:

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him."  
(Lk 15:20, context = Lk 15:11-19)

**In all his wanderings, that father's love had never lost sight of his wayward child** (**Ed note:** Beloved reader, perhaps you like me have a "wayward child" who is a "great way off" and you too like me have not manifested the heart attitude of the father Jesus describes. May God's Spirit grant us amazing grace to love our "wayward child" with genuine **agape love** in Christ. Amen). It tracked him along all his windings, followed him to the very swine-trough, hovered around him even then, and waited and welcomed his return. We may doubt, and debase, and deny our divine relationship, yet God will never disown us as his children,

nor disinherit us as his heirs. We may cease to act as a child, he will never cease to love as a Father. To him, then, as to a Father at all times repair. "Have faith in God." Confide in his heart to love you; in his counsel to guide you; and in his power to sustain you. Cast from you the fetters that enthrall, and pray to be upheld by his free Spirit. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." ([The Spirit of Adoption](#) in the book entitled [NO CONDEMNATION IN CHRIST JESUS by Octavius Winslow](#))

**Dr Ray Pritchard** ([www.keepbelieving.com](http://www.keepbelieving.com)) has an instructive sermon on Adoption: Plenty of Room in the Family

January 2007 - When Leslie Lynch King, Jr. died earlier this week, it made headlines around the world. Commentators talked about his legacy, and in the United States flags were lowered to half-staff in his honor. That always happens when a president dies.

But who was President King? You can't find any record of a man by that name occupying the White House. But he did. Leslie Lynch King, Jr. served as president during a crisis moment in American history. He is remembered as a decent and honorable man whose solid Midwestern values guided his political career. You can't find any record of President King because no one by that name ever served as president.

Leslie Lynch King, Jr. was born on Monday, July 14, 1913 in Omaha, Nebraska. His parents separated sixteen days after his birth and were divorced the following December. According to press reports (cited by **Wikipedia**), his father was abusive and had a drinking problem. His mother took her baby and moved back to her parents' home in Grand Rapids, Michigan where she later married Gerald Ford, a paint salesman. He later adopted young Leslie and gave him his own name. Thus Leslie Lynch King became Gerald Ford, the 38th president of the United States. As I write these words, he is lying in repose in California, awaiting the formal state funeral in Washington next week.

I never knew he was adopted until he died, and therefore I never learned his birth name until I read it in the news reports. Born Leslie Lynch King, by adoption Gerald Ford entered a new family and was given a new name.

- One man.
- Two names.
- Two families.

Adoption is not a subject we talk about very much in church. We don't often think about it from a biblical point of view. But as I begin this message, I realize that there are many people who are intimately acquainted with adoption. You may have been adopted, or you may have adopted a child yourself, or perhaps you were raised in a family that included adopted children. If any of those things is true about you, you probably have a better understanding of the biblical teaching than those who have never experienced adoption first hand.

## I. Adoption Defined

Many Christians don't realize that adoption is a profoundly biblical concept. It is one of the key words that the Apostle Paul uses to describe our relationship to God. Let's begin with a simple definition.

Adoption is the legal act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents. Adoption results in the severing of the parental responsibilities and rights of the biological parents and the placing of those responsibilities and rights onto the adoptive parents. After the finalization of an adoption, there is no legal difference between biological and adopted children in most jurisdictions (from **Wikipedia** on adoption).

We can summarize this further in three statements:

- 1) There is a person who is not a member of your family by birth.
- 2) There is a legal process.
- 3) There is now a new member of your family as a result.

In a number of places, the New Testament uses the word adoption to describe how we come into God's family (Romans 8:15, 23, 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). However, the meaning is not exactly the same as our common English usage. The Greek word for adoption means to place as a son within a family with full family privileges as an adult member of the family. That's the background of Paul's thought in Galatians 4:1-7.

The heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God

has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

Verses one and two describe a common situation in the first century. Imagine a son whose father is extremely wealthy. One day the son will inherit the entire estate for himself. Under Roman law, because he is a minor child, being raised as a minor child, he is treated no differently than a slave. He is heir to all that his father owns, but while he is growing up he has no more rights than a slave does. Although he will one day inherit the whole estate, he is subject to guardians, nannies, babysitters, tutors, helpers, hired people and trustees who watch over him until the time set by his father. Although he is an heir, he is treated as a slave until the time his father decides to set him free.

In verse four we see what God did by sending his Son to the world (vv. 4-5):

**1) God sent him to redeem those under the law.**

**2) That we might receive full rights as sons.**

When we come to Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us new life and the assurance that we are God's children. This is the “still, small voice” of God that speaks to the soul and whispers, “You are now a child of God.” That same Holy Spirit within us cries out “Abba, Father.” The word “Abba” comes from an Aramaic word that little children would use to speak to their fathers. It is an intimate, personal word of endearing affection. In English you might say “Dad” or “Daddy” or “Papa” or “Dear Father.” It's a very tender way of talking to our Heavenly Father. No longer is he some distant God up in the sky. Now he is our “Heavenly Daddy.”

In all the world there was only one person I called “Dad.” When I or my three brothers Andy, Alan and Ronnie said, “Dad,” our father would turn and listen to our voices. The privilege of calling him “Dad” was given to us and only to us. The same is true of my three sons. Josh, Mark and Nick are the only people in the world who have that unique relationship with me. Others may call me “Dad,” but it doesn't mean the same thing. I was one of my father's four sons; I am the father to my three sons. They have a unique claim on me that other children don't have. So it is in the spiritual realm. If we know Jesus as Savior, God is now our Heavenly Father and we can come to him in prayer anytime, anywhere, for any reason, and he will never turn us away. When we are in trouble, when the world has turned against us, when we are so discouraged that we feel like giving up, when we are confused about what to do next, the Holy Spirit whispers, “Talk to your Father in heaven. He's waiting to hear from you.” The Spirit within us brings us back to our Father again and again and teaches us to say, “Abba, Father.”

Here are six blessings Paul mentions in Galatian 4 that flow to us because Christ came.

1) We are redeemed (Gal 4:5a).

2) We are adopted (Gal 4:5b).

3) The Holy Spirit now lives within us (Gal 4:6a).

4) We call God Father (Gal 4:6b).

5) We are now God's children (Gal 4:7a).

6) We are the heirs of God (Gal 4:7b).

Gal 4:5 is the heart of the matter. Christ came **“to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”** The NIV uses the phrase **“full rights of sons”** to bring out the meaning of adoption. Christ came to redeem us and to adopt us into God's family. To redeem means to set free from slavery by the payment of a price. You redeemed a slave by paying the purchase price and then setting him free. Now suppose that in addition to freeing that slave, you also said to him, “Come with me to my home and live with me. I want you to legally join my family, take my name, and take an equal share in my inheritance.” As amazing as it sounds, that's what God did for us the moment we trusted Christ. He set us free (redeemed us) from the slavery of sin with the purchase price of the blood of Christ. Then he brought us into his family and gave us “full rights” as his own children. The concept of “full rights” means that no matter how badly we may have sinned before conversion, there are no second-class children in God's family. God has no stepchildren. In the Jewish culture, young boys are considered men by going through a ritual called a Bar Mitzvah. You might say that when we come to Christ, we are “Bar Mitzvahed” into God's family. We come in as full members of the family with rights and privileges equal to those who have been there for 40 or 50 years. We can pray and claim God's promises on the same basis as everyone else.

Let's suppose that one of my three sons does something wrong and later feels bad about it. So he comes to me and says, “Dad, I'm very sorry for what I did and I'm going to try to do better in the future. I'm going to try to be more of a son to you from now on.” When I hear those words, I'll say something like this, “Son, I love you and I'm glad you feel bad about what you did and I



know you want to do better in the future. But I want you to know that no matter what you do, you could never be more of a son to me than you are right now. Being my son has nothing to do with what you do or don't do. You are my son by virtue of being a part of my family. Nothing you do can ever change that fact." Think about that for a moment. If one of my boys should rebel against all that I have taught him, and if he should move to some distant place and change his name so that no one will know he is my son, and if he should adopt some way of life that is far removed from what I believe is right, I will be heartbroken and perhaps I will be angry, but no matter what he does, he will always be my son and I will always love him. Once a son, always a son. Nothing my boys can do can ever change that fact.

The same is true in our relationship with God. Our standing isn't based on our performance. That's good news because we all fail sooner or later. Our standing is based on God's grace, which means it doesn't depend on us. Once a child of God, always a child of God. We may do things that displease our Heavenly Father. If we persist in disobedience, we will be disciplined by the Lord. But that discipline, painful though it may be, comes to us because we are God's children (see Hebrews 12:4-11). It is a mark of our salvation. We are disciplined because we are the children of God, not in order to stay in God's family. Our standing is secure because it is not based on our performance.

## II. Adoption Explained

Where did Paul get his concept of adoption? He did not get it from the Old Testament because there is not much about adoption in the Old Testament.

Legal adoption was not prescribed in Jewish law or practiced by the Israelites. In fact, the term "adoption" does not occur in the Old Testament. While there are several possible allusions to adoption, such as Moses (Exodus 2:10), Genubath (1Kings 11:20), and Esther (Esther 2:7), the incidents recorded take place in foreign societies (Egyptian and Persian) and there is no evidence that legal adoptions were enacted ([Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)).

When Paul talks about adoption, he is not referring back to the Old Testament. He is referring to the Roman law of his day. Wealthy childless couples often practiced adoption to provide a legal heir for their wealth. They would adopt a slave and bring him into their family so that their wealth could be passed on to another generation.

There are three keys to understanding Roman law regarding adoption.

### 1) The absolute right of the father.

Under Roman law fathers had absolute right over their entire estate. They had rights over all that they owned, and their children were considered to be their personal property. In fact, a father in ancient Rome had the power of life and death over his children and in the early days of the Roman Empire, if a father wanted to put his children to death, he could legally do it and nobody could say anything to him about it. So great was the power of a father under Roman law that the son would never be out from underneath his father's authority as long as the father was alive. A son could be 70 years old and the father could be 93 years old, and under Roman law he was still under his father's authority.

### 2) The right of the adopted son.

If a son was adopted into a new family, he was guaranteed legal rights to his father's property. That is always one of the questions if you have biological children as well as adopted children. How will it all work in terms of the family inheritance? Roman law made it clear that an adopted child had exactly the same rights as all other children and no one could come before the adopted child—not the biological children and not other adopted children. He gained full inheritance rights with all the other children of the family.

### 3) The disappearance of the old life.

Adoption not only gave you a new name and a new family, it also mean your old life was gone forever. So complete was the transformation that if you were adopted into a new family and you had old debts, at the moment of adoption all those old debts were canceled, wiped away forever. The adopted son in Rome was regarded as a new person, entering a brand-new life.

Scholars tell us that the adopted son went through a very serious and impressive ceremony. Because the father had absolute power in that situation, if the biological father was going to give up his son for adoption, the biological father would go into a public place carrying copper and scales. He would three times go through an action that signified he was selling his son. The first time he would buy him back. The second time he would buy him back. The third time he would sell his son, but he wouldn't buy him back. That would signify the father was giving up his absolute right over his son. Then the adopted father would go before the magistrate and present papers proving he had the right to adopt the son

Here are the words of **William Barclay**:

It is Paul's picture that when a man became a Christian he entered into the very family of God. He does nothing to deserve it. God, the great Father, in his amazing love and mercy, has taken the lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinner and adopted him into his own family, so that the debts are canceled and the glory inherited.

### III. Adoption Distinguished

To speak of adoption in these terms leads to a logical question. Doesn't the Bible say we are born into God's family? The answer is yes (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:3). If that is true, how can we be adopted?

Are we born again or are we adopted? The answer is yes.

*Both are correct because we are both born again and adopted into God's family.* Here is the difference. The new birth establishes a new relationship with God. That is why Jesus said to Nicodemus, **"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again"** (John 3:3 NIV). The new birth emphasizes how we come into God's family—as helpless children who are born into the family only by God's sovereign grace (John 1:13).

John Fok helps us understand the difference between adoption and other key salvation terms:

As the Greek word indicates, adoption (read Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5) is literally "placing as a son." Regeneration has to do with our change in nature; justification, with our change in standing; sanctification, with our change in character; adoption, with our change in position. According to Paul, the chief advantages of sonship are deliverance from the law (Galatians 4:3, 4, 5) and the possession of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption and sonship (Galatians 4:6; cf. Romans 8:15f).

We are born into God's family through the new birth and through adoption we are immediately advanced to a state of full privilege and responsibility. From the moment of salvation God treats us as full adults, not as little kids. The following chart makes the difference clear:

#### New Birth

New Life

From Spiritual Death

Children needing growth

#### Adoption

New Standing

From Slavery

Full rights and privileges

When you graduate from a college or university, you receive a degree that is conferred with "all rights and privileges pertaining thereto." It means that when you graduate, you get all the rights that go with having the degree.

When you become a citizen of the United States, you become a full citizen. There is no second class citizenship. If you are a citizen, you have the same rights any other citizen has. If you become a citizen, it doesn't matter whether you were born in the United States or whether you are a naturalized citizen, by law the same rights apply to everyone. It is the same way in terms of adoption and the spiritual realm.

Adoption guarantees the following seven things to every believer:

- 1) You are a full member of God's family.
- 2) You have full rights and privileges in heaven.
- 3) You have immediate access to God.
- 4) You belong to his family.
- 5) You bear his name.
- 6) You have a full share in the inheritance he promises his children.
- 7) Satan has no claim on you because you are no longer a part of his family and he is no longer your father.

## IV. Adoption Applied

**1) Adoption means that you have a new family.** The old family is gone forever. The old master is gone forever. The old name is gone forever. God is your Father, the Lord Jesus is your Savior, and the Holy Spirit lives within you.

**2) Adoption means that you have a new privilege.** You have the same right as the oldest saints of God. In our world there are exclusive clubs with members dependent on who you know and how much money you have. There is a children's membership, a family membership, associate membership, blue-level membership, green-level membership, silver-level membership and for the hoity-toity people on the top, there is a gold-level membership. But God only has one level of membership. Everyone who comes into the family of God comes in the same way because the ground is level at the foot of the cross. He only has one class. Everyone in God's family has gold card standing. Everyone is born again. Everyone has full rights. Everyone is at the head of the class. Everyone comes in at the best possible level.

**3) Adoption means you have a new responsibility.** What God says to any believer he says to every believer. The same Holy Spirit who is given to the gray-haired Christian is given to the new Christian. No one need feel like a second class citizen. No believer can use that as an excuse. You can never say, "Well, I don't want to read my Bible. I am just a new Christian." That won't wash with God. Nobody can say they can't pray because they are just a new Christian. God will not accept that excuse. You can't say you won't testify for Christ because you have recently been born again and aren't as good as those who have been saved for a long time. That is not a biblical thing to say because what God says to any of his children, he says to all his children. The responsibility that is laid on one is laid on all.

There are great advantages in being born again at an early age. If you have been saved for a long time, you ought to have a deeper understanding of God. You should be more skillful in walking by grace. But God does not give anything to the oldest saint of God that he doesn't also give to the newest Christian. The moment you come to Jesus Christ, all the resources of heaven are put at your disposal.

### What does all this mean?

You are rich now. Don't live like a pauper.

You have the Holy Spirit. Don't live in the flesh.

You have access to God. Use it.

You have brothers and sisters. Lean on them.

You have spiritual gifts. Put them to work for Christ.

You have been set free from Satan's power. Don't mess around with the devil anymore.

You have a new family. Stop living like you belong to your old one.

Earthly adoption offers a wonderful picture of God's gift to us because for adoption to happen, the parents must be willing to do it and they must be able to do it. They must choose to do it. To those of you who are adopted, God bless you. To those of you who have adopted children, God bless you. Thank you for modeling for us what God's great love really looks like.

If they understand this truth, adopted children can say, "Someone must have loved me very much." Adoption never just happens. There is no such thing as an accidental adoption. It takes trouble, time, expense, effort, sweat, heartache and tears. Somebody has to open their heart and their home for children to be adopted. In the very same way, biblical adoption is only possible because God is willing to add more children to his family. That is one of the sweetest thoughts I have ever come across.

On earth, adoption gives a child a new name, a new home, a new address, a new history and a new destiny. The same is true with God's adoption. It gives the child of God a new name, a new home, a new address, a new history and a new destiny. The poet Robert Frost defined home as "the place where, when you go there, they have to take you in."

Brothers and sisters, God is our true Heavenly Father because he chose to add us to his family. Because of adoption, when we go to him, he always opens the door and says, "Welcome, my child. This is your home forever." Amen. ([Adoption Plenty of Room in the Family - sermon by Dr. Ray Pritchard - January 2007](#))