

The Life of Faith Chapter 3 The Spirit Assuring

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Transcript

The Life of Faith

Chapter 3

The Spirit Assuring

We do not propose to treat of the Spirit assuring in a topical and general way, but to confine ourselves to his inspiring the Christian with a sense of his adoption into the family of God, limiting ourselves to two or three particular passages which treat specifically thereof. In Romans 8:15 we read, "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." The eighth chapter of Romans has ever been a great favorite with the Lord's people, for it contains a wide variety of cordials for their encouragement and strengthening in the running of that heavenly race which is marked out and set before them in the Word of God. The apostle is there writing to such as have been brought, by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, to know and believe on the Lord Jesus, and who by their communion with him are led to set their affection upon things above. First, let us observe that Romans 8:15 opens with the word, "For," which not only suggests a close connection with that which precedes, but intimates that a proof is now furnished of what had just been affirmed. In verse 12, the apostle had said, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh": the "Therefore" being a conclusion drawn from all the considerations set forth in verses 1-11. Next, the apostle had declared, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (v 13); which means, first, ye shall continue to "live" a life of grace now; and second, this shall be followed by a "life" of glory throughout eternity. Then the apostle added, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (v 14), which is a confirmation and amplification of verse 13: none live a life of grace save those who are "led by the Spirit of God"—are inwardly controlled and outwardly governed by him: for they only are "the sons of God". Delivered from bondage Now, in verse 15, the apostle both amplifies and confirms what he had said in verse 14: there he shows the reality of that relationship with God which our regeneration makes manifest—obedient subjection to him as dear children; here he brings before us further proof of our Divine sonship—deliverance from a servile fear, the exercise of a filial confidence. Let us consider the negative first: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear." By nature we were in "bondage" to sin, to Satan, to the world; yet they did not work in us a spirit of "fear", so they cannot be (as some have supposed) what the apostle had reference to: rather is it what the Spirit's convicting us of sin wrought in us. When he applies the law to the conscience our complacency is shattered, our false peace is

destroyed, and we are terrified at the thought of God's righteous wrath and the prospect of eternal punishment. When a soul has received life and light from the Spirit of God, so that he perceives the infinite enormity and filthiness of sin, and the total depravity and corruption of every faculty of his soul and body, that spirit of legality which is in all men by nature, is at once stirred up and alarmed, so that the mind is possessed with secret doubts and suspicions of God's mercy in Christ to save; and thereby the soul is brought into a state of legal bondage and fear. When a soul is first awakened by the Holy Spirit, it is subject to a variety of fears; yet it does not follow from thence that he works those fears or is the author of them: rather are they to be ascribed to our own unbelief. When the Spirit is pleased to convict of sin and gives the conscience to feel the guilt of it, it is to show the sinner his need of Christ, and not to drive him unto despair. No doubt there is also a dispensational allusion in the passage we are now considering. During the Mosaic economy, believing Israelites were to a considerable extent under the spirit of legal bondage, because the sacrifices and ablutions of the Levitical institutions could not take away sins. The precepts of the ceremonial law were so numerous, so various, so burdensome, that the Jews were kept in perpetual bondage. Hence, we find Peter referring to the same as "a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10). Much under the Old Testament dispensation tended to a legal spirit. But believers, under the gospel, are favored with a clearer, fuller, and more glorious display and revelation of God's grace in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the evangel making known the design and sufficiency of his finished work, so that full provision is now made to deliver them from all servile fear. An eternal relationship Turning now to the positive side: believers have "received the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father": they have received that unspeakable Gift which attests and makes known to them their adoption by God. Before the foundation of the world God predestinated them "unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself (Eph. 1:5). But more: the elect were not only predestinated unto the adoption of children - to actually and openly enjoy this inestimable favour in time - but this blessing was itself provided and bestowed upon them in the Everlasting Covenant of grace, in which they not only had promise of this relationship, but were given in that covenant to Christ under that very character. Therefore does the Lord Jesus say, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me" (Heb. 2:13). It is to be carefully noted that God's elect are spoken of as "children" previous to the Holy Spirit's being sent into their hearts: "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts" (Gal. 4:6). They are not, then, made children by the new birth. They were "children" before Christ died for them: "he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:51, 52). They were not, then, made children by what Christ did for them. Yea, they were "children" before the Lord Jesus became incarnate: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same" (Heb. 2:14). Thus it is a great mistake to confound adoption and regeneration: they are two distinct things; the latter being both the effect and evidence of the former. Adoption was by an act of God's will in eternity; regeneration is by the work of his grace in time. Had there been no adoption, there would be no regeneration: yet the former is not complete without the latter. By adoption the elect were put into the relation of children; by regeneration they are given a nature suited to that relation. So high is the honor of being taken into the family of God, and so wondrous is the privilege of having God for our Father, that some extraordinary benefit is needed by us to assure our hearts of the same. This we have when we receive the Spirit of adoption. For God to give us his Spirit is far more than if he had given us all the world, for the latter would be something outside himself, whereas the former is himself. The death of Christ on the cross was a demonstration of God's love for his people, yet that was done without them; but in connection with what we are now considering "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). It is a wondrous and blessed fact that God

manifests his love to the members of his Church in precisely the same way that he evidenced his love to its head when he became incarnate, namely, by the transcendent gift of his Spirit. The Spirit came upon Jesus Christ as the proof of God's love to him and also as the visible demonstration of his Sonship. The Spirit of God descended like a dove and abode upon him, and then the Father's voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (compare John 3:34,35). In fulfillment of Christ's prayer, "I have declared to them thy name, and will declare it; that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them" (John 17:26), the Spirit is given to his redeemed, to signify the sameness of the Father's love to his Son and to his sons. Thus, the inhabitation of the Spirit in the Christian is both the surest sign of God's fatherly love and the proof of his adoption. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). Because they had been eternally predestinated unto the adoption of sons (Eph. 1:4, 5); because they were actually given to Christ under that character in the Everlasting Covenant (John 11:52; Heb. 2:13), at God's appointed time the Holy Spirit is sent into their hearts to give them a knowledge of the wondrous fact that they have a place in the very family of God and that God is their Father. This it is which inclines their hearts to love him, delight in him, and place all their dependence on him. The great design of the gospel is to reveal the love of God to his people, and thereby recover their love to God, that they may love him again who first loved them. But the bare revelation of that love in the Word will not secure this, until "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). It is by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit that the elect are recovered from the flesh and the world unto God. By nature they love themselves and the world above God; but the Holy Spirit imparts to them a new nature, and himself indwells them, so that they now love God and live to him. This it is which prepares them to believe and appropriate the gospel. The effects of the Spirit's entering as the Spirit of adoption are liberty, confidence and holy delight. As they had "received" from the first Adam "the spirit of bondage"—a legalistic spirit which produced "fear", their receiving the Spirit of adoption is all the more grateful: liberty being the sweeter because of the former captivity. The law having done its work in the conscience, they can now appreciate the glad tidings of the gospel—the revelation of the amazing love and grace of God in Jesus Christ. A spirit of love is now bred in them by the knowledge of the same. A filial spirit The blessed fruit of receiving the Spirit of adoption is that there is born in them a childlike affection towards God and a childlike confidence in him: "Whereby we cry, Abba, Father." The apostle employs in the original two different languages. "Abba", being Syrian, and "Father" being Greek, the one familiar to the Jews, the other to the Gentiles. By so doing he denotes that believing Jews and Gentiles are children of one family, alike privileged to approach God as their Father. Christ, our peace, having broken down the middle wall of partition between them; and now, at the same mercy seat, the Christian Jew and the believing Gentile, both one in Christ Jesus, meet, as the rays of light converge and blend in one common center—at the feet of the reconciled Father (Octavius Winslow).

As the Spirit of adoption, the Holy Spirit bestows upon the quickened soul a filial spirit: he acts in unison with the Son and gives a sense of our relationship as sons. Emancipating from that bondage and fear which the application of the law stirred up within us, he brings us into the joyous liberty which the reception of the gospel bestows. O the blessedness of being delivered from the Covenant of Works! O the bliss of reading our sentence of pardon in the blood of Immanuel! It is by virtue of our having received the Spirit of adoption that we cry "Father! Father!" It is the cry of our own heart, the desire of our soul going out to God. And yet our spirit does not originate it: without the immediate presence, operation and grace of the Holy Spirit we neither would nor could know God as our "Father". The Spirit is the Author of everything in us which goes out after God. This filial spirit which the Christian has received is evidenced in various ways. First, by a holy reverence for God our Father, as the natural child should honour or reverence his human parent. Second, by confidence in God our Father, as the natural child trusts in and relies upon his earthly

parent. Third, by love for our Father, as the natural child has an affectionate regard for his parent. Fourth, by subjection to God our Father, as the natural child obeys his parent. This filial spirit prompts him to approach God with spiritual freedom, so that he clings to him with the confidence of a babe, and leans upon him with the calm repose of a little one lying on its parent's breast. It admits to the closest intimacy. To God as his "Father" the Christian should repair at all times, casting all his care upon him, knowing that he careth for him (1 Peter 5:7). It is to be manifested by an affectionate subjection (obedience) to him "as dear children" (Ephesians 5:1). The Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of God, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son, and who is sent by them to shed abroad the love of God in the heart, to give a real enjoyment of it, and to fill the soul with joy and peace in believing. He comes to testify of Christ; and by taking of the things which are his, and showing them to his people, he draws their heart to him; and by opening unto them the freeness and fullness of Divine grace, and the exceeding great and precious promises which God has given unto his people, he leads them to know their interest in Christ; and helps them in his name, blood, and righteousness, to approach their heavenly Father with holy delight (S. E. Pierce).

John Gill observes that the word "Abba" reads backwards the same as forwards, implying that God is the Father of his people in adversity as well as prosperity. The Christian's is an inalienable relationship: God is as much his "Father" when he chastens as when he delights, as much so when he frowns as when he smiles. God will never disown his own children or disinherit them as heirs. When Christ taught his disciples to pray he bade them approach the mercy seat and say, "Our Father which art in heaven". He himself, in Gethsemane, cried, "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36) —expressive of his confidence in and dependency upon him. To address God as "Father" encourages faith, confirms hope, warms the heart, and draws out its affections to him who is Love itself. Let it next be pointed Out that this filial spirit is subject to the state and place in which the Christian yet is. Some suppose that if we have received the Spirit of adoption there must be produced a steady and uniform assurance, a perpetual fire burning upon the altar of the heart. Not so. When the Son of God became incarnate, he condescended to yield unto all the sinless infirmities of human nature, so that he hungered and ate, wearied and slept. In like manner, the Holy Spirit deigns to submit himself to the laws and circumstances which ordinarily regulate human nature. In heaven the man Christ Jesus is glorified; and in heaven the Spirit in the Christian will shine like a perpetual star. But on earth, he indwells our hearts like a flickering flame; never to be extinguished, but not always bright, and needing to be guarded from rude blasts, or why bid us "quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19)? The Spirit, then, does not grant the believer assurance irrespective of his own carefulness and diligence. "Let your loins be girded, your lights burning" (Luke 12:35): the latter being largely determined by the former. The Christian is not always in the enjoyment of a childlike confidence. And why? Because he is often guilty of "grieving" the Spirit, and then he withholds much of his comfort. Hereby we may ascertain our communion with God and when it is interrupted, when he be pleased or displeased with us—by the motions or withdrawing of the Spirit's consolation. Note the order in Acts 9:31, "Walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit"; and again in Acts 11:24, "he was a good man and full of the Holy Spirit". Hence, when our confidence toward "the Father" is clouded, we should search our ways and find out what is the matter. Empty professors are fatally deluded by a false confidence, a complacent taking for granted that they are real Christians when they have never been born again. But many true possessors are plagued by a false diffidence, a doubting whether they be Christians at all. None are so inextricably caught in the toils of a false confidence as they who suspect not their delusion and are unconscious of their imminent danger. On the other hand, none are so far away from that false confidence as those who tremble lest they be cherishing it. True diffidence is a distrust of myself True confidence is a leaning wholly upon Christ, and that is ever accompanied by utter renunciation of myself. Self-renunciation is the heartfelt

acknowledgment that my resolutions, best efforts, faith and holiness, are nothing before God, and that Christ must be my All. In all genuine Christians there is a co-mingling of real confidence and false diffidence, because as long as they remain on this earth there is in them the root of faith and the root of doubt. Hence their prayer is, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief (Mark 9:24). In some Christians faith prevails more than it does in others; in some unbelief is more active than in others. Therefore some have a stronger and steadier assurance than others. The presence of the indwelling Spirit is largely evidenced by our frequent recourse to the Father in prayer—often with sighs, sobs, and groans. The consciousness of the Spirit of adoption within us is largely regulated by the extent to which we yield ourselves to his government.

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