

The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption

by John Wesley

The sermon explores the three states of being: the natural man, under the law, and under grace, highlighting the transition from bondage to freedom through faith in Jesus Christ.

Scripture: John 1:12, Romans 6:14, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 3:17, Galatians 4:6, Ephesians 2:8-9, Philippians 4:7, Hebrews 2:15, 1 Peter 1:8-9, 1 John 4:18

Topics: "Freedom in Christ", "Spirit of Adoption"

Description

John Wesley emphasizes the transformative power of the Spirit of adoption in contrast to the spirit of bondage and fear. He explains that true children of God, through faith, receive the Spirit that allows them to call God 'Abba, Father,' moving from a state of fear to one of love and acceptance. Wesley warns that many in the Christian world remain in a state of spiritual ignorance, lacking both the fear and love of God, and encourages believers to examine their spiritual state. He outlines the three states of man: the natural man, the one under the law, and the one under grace, highlighting the importance of moving from fear to love through the grace of God. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper relationship with God, characterized by love and the assurance of salvation.

Transcript

"Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." Romans 8:15.

1. ST. PAUL here speaks to those who are the children of God by faith. "Ye," saith he, who are indeed his children, have drunk into his Spirit; "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again unto fear;" "but, because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts." "Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

2. The spirit of bondage and fear is widely distant from this loving Spirit of adoption: Those who are influenced only by slavish fear, cannot be termed "the sons of God;" yet some of them may be styled his servants, and are "not far from the kingdom of heaven."

3. But it is to be feared, the bulk of mankind, yea, of what is called the Christian world, have not attained even this; but are still afar off, "neither is God in all their thoughts." A few names may be found of those who love God; a few more there are that fear him; but the greater part have neither the fear of God before their eyes, nor the love of God in their hearts.

4. Perhaps most of you, who, by the mercy of God, now partake of a better spirit, may remember the time when ye were as they, when ye were under the same condemnation. But at first ye knew it not, though ye were wallowing daily in your sins and in your blood; till, in due time, ye "received the spirit of fear;" (ye received, for this also is the gift of God;) and afterwards, fear vanished away, and the Spirit of love filled your hearts.

5. One who is in the first state of mind, without fear of love, is in Scripture termed a "natural man:" One who is under the spirit of bondage and fear, is sometimes said to be "under the law:" (Although that expression more frequently signifies one who is under the Jewish dispensation, or who thinks himself obliged to observe all the rites and ceremonies of the Jewish law:) But one who has exchanged the spirit of fear for the Spirit of love, is properly said to be "under grace."

Now, because it highly imports us to know what spirit we are of, I shall endeavour to point out distinctly, First, the state of a "natural man:" Secondly, that of one who is "under the law:" And Thirdly, of one who is "under grace."

I. 1. And, First, the state of a natural man. This the Scripture represents as a state of sleep: The voice of God to him is, "Awake thou that sleepest." For his soul is in a deep sleep: His spiritual senses are not awake; They discern neither spiritual good nor evil. The eyes of his understanding are closed; They are sealed together, and see not. Clouds and darkness continually rest upon them; for he lies in the valley of the shadow of death. Hence having no inlets for the knowledge of spiritual things, all the avenues of his soul being shut up, he is in gross, stupid ignorance of whatever he is most concerned to know. He is utterly ignorant of God, knowing nothing concerning him as he ought to know. He is totally a stranger to the law of God, as to its true, inward, spiritual meaning. He has no conception of that evangelical holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord; nor of the happiness which they only find whose "life is hid with Christ in God."

2. And for this very reason, because he is fast asleep, he is, in some sense, at rest. Because he is blind, he is also secure; He saith, "Tush, there shall no harm happen unto me." The darkness which covers him on every side, keeps him in a kind of peace; so far as peace can consist with the works of the devil, and with an earthly, devilish mind. He sees not that he stands on the edge of the pit, therefore he fears it not. He cannot tremble at the danger he does not know. He has not understanding enough to fear. Why is it that he is in no dread of God? Because he is totally ignorant of him: If not saying in his heart, "There is no God;" or, that "he sitteth on the circle of the heavens, and humbleth" not "himself to behold the things which are done on earth:" yet satisfying himself as well to all Epicurean intents and purposes, by saying, "God is merciful;" confounding and swallowing up all at once in that unwieldy idea of mercy, all his holiness and essential hatred of sin; all his justice, wisdom, and truth. He is in no dread of the vengeance denounced against those who obey not the blessed law of God, because he understands it not. He imagines the main point is to do thus, to be outwardly blameless; and sees not that it extends to every temper, desire, thought, motion of the heart. Or he fancies that the obligation hereto is ceased; that Christ came to "destroy the Law and the Prophets;" to save his people in, not from their sins; to bring them to heaven without holiness: -- Notwithstanding his own words, "Not one jot or tittle of the law shall pass away, till all things are fulfilled;" and "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

3. He is secure, because he is utterly ignorant of himself. Hence he talks of "repenting by and by;" he does not indeed exactly know when, but some time or other before he dies; taking it for granted, that this is quite

in his own power. For what should hinder his doing it, if he will? if he does but once set a resolution, no fear but he will make it good!

4. But this ignorance never so strongly glares, as in those who are termed, men of learning. If a natural man be one of these, he can talk at large of his rational faculties, of the freedom of his will, and the absolute necessity of such freedom, in order to constitute man a moral agent. He reads, and argues, and proves to a demonstration, that every man may do as he will; may dispose his own heart to evil or good, as it seems best in his own eyes. Thus the god of this world spreads a double veil of blindness over his heart, lest, by any means, "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine" upon it.

5. From the same ignorance of himself and God, there may sometimes arise, in the natural man, a kind of joy, in congratulating himself upon his own wisdom and goodness: And what the world calls joy, he may often possess. He may have pleasure in various kinds; either in gratifying the desires of the flesh, or the desire of the eye, or the pride of life; particularly if he has large possessions; if he enjoy an affluent fortune; then he may "clothe" himself "in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day." And so long as he thus doeth well unto himself, men will doubtless speak good of him. They will say, "He is a happy man." For, indeed, this is the sum of worldly happiness; to dress, and visit, and talk, and eat, and drink, and rise up to play.

6. It is not surprising, if one in such circumstances as these, dosed with the opiates of flattery and sin, should imagine, among his other waking dreams, that he walks in great liberty. How easily may he persuade himself, that he is at liberty from all vulgar errors, and from the prejudice of education; judging exactly right, and keeping clear of all extremes. "I am free," may he say, "from all the enthusiasm of weak and narrow souls; from superstition, the disease of fools and cowards, always righteous over much; and from bigotry, continually incident to those who have not a free and generous way of thinking." And too sure it is, that he is altogether free from the "wisdom which cometh from above," from holiness, from the religion of the heart, from the whole mind which was in Christ.

7. For all this time he is the servant of sin. He commits sin, more or less, day by day. Yet he is not troubled: He "is in no bondage," as some speak; he feels no condemnation. He contents himself (even though he should profess to believe that the Christian Revelation is of God) with, "Man is frail. We are all weak. Every man has his infirmity." Perhaps he quotes Scripture: "Why, does not Solomon say, -- The righteous man falls into sin seven times a day! -- And, doubtless, they are all hypocrites or enthusiasts who pretend to be better than their neighbours." If, at any time, a serious thought fix upon him, he stifles it as soon as possible, with, "Why should I fear, since God is merciful, and Christ died for sinners?" Thus, he remains a willing servant of sin, content with the bondage of corruption; inwardly and outwardly unholy, and satisfied therewith; not only not conquering sin, but not striving to conquer, particularly that sin which doth so easily beset him.

8. Such is the state of every natural man; whether he be a gross, scandalous transgressor, or a more reputable and decent sinner, having the form, though not the power of godliness. But how can such an one be convinced of sin? How is he brought to repent? To be under the law? To receive the spirit of bondage unto fear? This is the point which is next to be considered.

II. 1. By some awful providence, or by his word applied with the demonstration of his Spirit, God touches the heart of him that lay asleep in darkness and in the shadow of death. He is terribly shaken out of his sleep, and awakes into a consciousness of his danger. Perhaps in a moment, perhaps by degrees, the

eyes of his understanding are opened, and now first (the veil being in part removed) discern the real state he is in. Horrid light breaks in upon his soul; such light, as may be conceived to gleam from the bottomless pit, from the lowest deep, from a lake of fire burning with brimstone. He at last sees the loving, the merciful God is also "a consuming fire;" that he is a just God and a terrible, rendering to every man according to his words, entering into judgment with the ungodly for every idle word, yea, and for the imaginations of the heart. He now clearly perceives, that the great and holy God is "of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;" that he is an avenger of every one who rebelleth against him, and repayeth the wicked to his face; and that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

2. The inward, spiritual meaning of the law of God now begins to glare upon him. He perceives "the commandment is exceeding broad," and there is "nothing hid from the light thereof." He is convinced, that every part of it relates, not barely to outward sin or obedience, but to what passes in the secret recesses of the soul, which no eye but God's can penetrate. If he now hears, "Thou shalt not kill," God speaks in thunder, "He that hateth his brother is a murderer;" "he that saith unto his brother, Thou fool, is obnoxious to hell-fire." If the law say, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," the voice of the Lord sounds in his ears, "He that looketh on a woman to lust after he hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." And thus, in every point, he feels the word of God "quick and powerful, sharper than a two-edged sword." It "pierces even to the dividing asunder of his soul and spirit, his joints and marrow." And so much the more, because he is conscious to himself of having neglected so great salvation; of having "trodden under foot the son of God," who would have saved him from his sins, and "counted the blood of the covenant an unholy," a common, unsanctifying thing.

3. And as he knows, "all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do," so he sees himself naked, stripped of all the fig-leaves which he had sewed together, of all his poor pretenses to religion or virtue, and his wretched excuses for sinning against God. He now sets himself like the ancient sacrifices, cleft in sunder, as it were, from the neck downward, so that all within him stands confessed. His heart is bare, and he sees it is all sin, "deceitful above all things, desperately wicked;" that it is altogether corrupt and abominable, more than it is possible for tongue to express; that there dwelleth therein no good thing, but unrighteousness and ungodliness only; every motion thereof, every temper and thought, being only evil continually.

4. And he not only sees, but feels in himself, by an emotion of soul which he cannot describe, that for the sins of his heart were his life without blame, (which yet it is not, and cannot be; seeing "an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit,") he deserves to be cast into the fire that never shall be quenched. He feels that "the wages," the just reward "of sin," of his sin above all, "is death;" even the second death; the death which dieth not; the destruction of body and soul in hell.

5. Here ends his pleasing dream, his delusive rest, his false peace, his vain security. His joy now vanishes as a cloud; pleasures, once loved, delight no more. They pall upon the taste: He loathes the nauseous sweet; he is weary to bear them. The shadows of happiness flee away, and sink into oblivion: So that he is stripped of all, and wanders to and fro, seeking rest, but finding none.

6. The fumes of those opiates being now dispelled, he feels the anguish of a wounded spirit. He finds that sin let loose upon the soul (whether it be pride, anger, or evil desire, whether self-will, malice, envy, revenge, or any other) is perfect misery: He feels sorrow of heart for the blessings he has lost, and the curse which is come upon him: remorse for having thus destroyed himself, and despised his own mercies; fear, from a lively sense of the wrath of God, and of the consequences of his wrath, of the punishment

which he has justly deserved, and which he sees hanging over his head; -- fear of death, as being to him the gate of hell, the entrance of death eternal; -- fear of the devil, the executioner of the wrath and righteous vengeance of God; -- fear of men, who, if they were able to kill his body, would thereby plunge both body and soul into hell; fear, sometimes arising to such a height, that the poor, sinful, guilty soul, is terrified with everything, with nothing, with shades, with a leaf shaken of the wind. Yea, sometimes it may even border upon distraction, making a man "drunken though not with wine," suspending the exercise of the memory, of the understanding, of all the natural faculties. Sometimes it may approach to the very brink of despair; so that he who trembles at the name of death, may yet be ready to plunge into it every moment, to "choose strangling rather than life." Well may such a man roar, like him of old, for the very disquietness of his heart. Well may he cry out, "The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?"

7. Now he truly desires to break loose from sin, and begins to struggle with it. But though he strive with all his might, he cannot conquer: Sin is mightier than he. He would fain escape; but he is so fast in prison, that he cannot get forth. He resolved against sin, but yet sins on: He sees the snare, and abhors, and runs into it. So much does his boasted reason avail, -- only to enhance his guilt, and increase his misery! Such is the freedom of his will; free only to evil; free to "drink in iniquity like water;" to wander farther and farther from the living God, and do more "despite to the Spirit of grace!"

8. The more he strive, wishes, labours to be free, the more does he feel his chains, the grievous chains of sin, wherewith Satan binds and "leads him captive at his will;" his servant he is, though he repine ever so much; though he rebel, he cannot prevail. He is still in bondage and fear, by reason of sin: Generally, of some outward sin, to which he is peculiarly disposed, either, by nature, custom, or outward circumstance; but always, of some inward sin, some evil temper or unholy affection. And the more he frets against it, the more it prevails; he may bite but cannot break his chain. Thus he toils without end, repenting and sinning, and repenting and sinning again, till at length the poor, sinful, helpless wretch is even at his wit's end and can barely groan, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

9. This whole struggle of one who is "under the law," under the "spirit of fear and bondage," is beautifully described by the Apostle in the foregoing chapter, speaking in the person of an awakened man. "I," saith he, "was alive without the law once:" (Verse 9:) I had much life, wisdom, strength, and virtue; so I thought: "But, when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died:" When the commandment, in its spiritual meaning, came to my heart, with the power of God, my inbred sin was stirred up, fretted, inflamed, and all my virtue died away. "And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me:" (Verses 10,11:) It came upon me unaware; slew all my hopes; and plainly showed, in the midst of life I was in death. "Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good:" (Verse 12:) I no longer lay the blame on this, but on the corruption of my own heart. I acknowledge that "the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin:" (Verse 14:) I now see both the spiritual nature of the law; and my own carnal, devilish heart "sold under sin," totally enslaved: (Like slave bought with money, who were absolutely at their master's disposal:) "For that which I do, I allow not; for what I would, I do not, but what I hate, that I do:" (Verse 15:) Such is the bondage under which I groan; such the tyranny of my hard master. "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do:" (Verses 18, 19:) "I find a law," an inward constraining power, "that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in "or consent to "the law of God, after the inward man:" (Verses 21, 22:) In my "mind:" (So the Apostle explains himself in the words that immediately follow; and so, _o esO

anthrOpos_, the inward man, is understood in all other Greek writers:) "But I see another law in my members," another constraining power, "warring against the law of my mind," or inward man, "and bringing me into captivity to the law" or power "of sin:" (Verse 23:) Dragging me, as it were, at my conqueror's chariot-wheels, into the very thing which my soul abhors. "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Verse 24.) Who shall deliver me from this helpless, dying life, from this bondage of sin and misery? Till this is done, "I myself" (or rather, that I, _autos egO_, that man I am now personating) "with the mind," or inward man, "serve the law of God;" my mind, my conscience is on God's side; "but with my flesh," with my body, "the law of sin," (verse 25,) being hurried away by a force I cannot resist.

10. How lively a portraiture is this of one "under the law;" one who feels the burden he cannot shake off; who pants after liberty, power, and love, but is in fear and bondage still! until the time that God answers the wretched man, crying out, "Who shall deliver me" from this bondage of sin, from this body of death? -- "The grace of God, through Jesus Christ thy Lord."

III. 1. Then it is that this miserable bondage ends, and he is no more "under the law, but under grace." This state we are, Thirdly, to consider; the state of one who has found grace or favour in the sight of God, even the Father, and who has the grace or power of the Holy Ghost, reigning in his heart; who has received, in the language of the Apostle, the "Spirit of adoption, whereby" he now cries, "Abba, Father!"

2. "He cried unto the Lord in his trouble, and God delivers him out of his distress." His eyes are opened in quite another manner than before, even to see a loving, gracious God. While he is calling, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory!" -- he hears a voice in the inmost soul, "I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord: I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." And, it is not long before "the Lord" descends in the cloud, and proclaims the name of the Lord." Then he sees, but not with eyes of flesh and blood, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, and forgiving iniquities, and transgressions and sin."

3. Heavenly, healing light now breaks in upon his soul. He "looks on him whom he had pierced;" and "God, who out of darkness commanded light to shine, shineth in his heart." He sees the light of the glorious love of God, in the face of Jesus Christ. He hath a divine "evidence of things not seen" by sense, even of the "deep things of God;" more particularly of the love of God, of his pardoning love to him that believes in Jesus. Overpowered with the sight, his whole soul cried out, "My Lord and my God;" For he sees all his iniquities laid on Him, who "bare them in his own body on the tree;" he beholds the Lamb of God taking away his sins. How clearly now does he discern, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself; making him sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God through him;" -- and that he himself is reconciled to God, by that blood of the covenant!

4. Here end both the guilt and power of sin. He can now say, "I am crucified with Christ: Nevertheless I live; yet not I but Christ liveth in me: And the life which I now live in the flesh," (even in this mortal body,) "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Here end remorse, and sorrow of heart, and the anguish of a wounded spirit. "God turneth his heaviness into joy." He made sore, and now his hands bind up. Here ends also that bondage unto fear; for "his heart standeth fast, believing in the Lord." He cannot fear any longer the wrath of God; for he knows it is now turned away from him, and looks upon Him no more as an angry Judge, but as a loving Father. He cannot fear the devil, knowing he has "no power, except it be given him from above." He fears not hell; being an heir of the kingdom of heaven:

Consequently, he has no fear of death; by reason whereof he was in time past, for so many years, "subject to bondage." Rather, knowing that "if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, he hath a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; he groaneth earnestly, desiring to be clothed upon with that house which is from heaven." He groans to shake off this house of earth, that "mortality" may be "swallowed up of life;" knowing that God "hath wrought him for the self-same thing; who hath also given him the earnest of his Spirit."

5. And "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" liberty, not only from guilt and fear, but from sin, from that heaviest of all yokes, that basest of all bondage. His labour is not now in vain. The snare is broken, and he is delivered. He not only strives, but likewise prevails; he not only fights, but conquers also. "Henceforth he does not serve sin." (Chap. 6:6 &c.) He is "dead unto sin, and alive unto God;" "sin doth not now reign," even "in his mortal body," nor doth he "obey it in the desires thereof." He does not "yield his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but as instruments of righteousness unto God." For "being now made free from sin, he is become the servant of righteousness."

6. Thus, "having peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ," "rejoicing in hope of the glory of God," and having power over all sin, over every evil desire, and temper, and word, and work, he is a living witness of the "glorious liberty of the sons of God;" all of whom, being partakers of like precious faith, bear record with one voice, "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father!"

7. It is this spirit which continually, "worketh in them, both to will and to do of his good pleasure." It is he that sheds the love of God abroad in their hearts, and the love of all mankind; thereby purifying their hearts from the love of world, from the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is by him they are delivered from anger and pride, from all vile and inordinate affections. In consequence, they are delivered from evil words and works, from all unholiness of conversation; doing no evil to any child of man, and being zealous of all good works.

8. To sum up all: the natural man neither fears nor loves God; one under the law, fears, -- one under grace, loves him. The first has no light in the things of God, but walks in utter darkness; the second sees the painful light of hell; the third, the joyous light of heaven. He that sleeps in death, has a false peace; he that is awakened, has no peace at all; he that believes, has true peace, -- the peace of God filling and ruling his heart. The Heathen, baptized or unbaptized, hath a fancied liberty, which is indeed licentiousness; the Jew, or one under the Jewish dispensation, is in heavy, grievous bondage; the Christian enjoys the true glorious liberty of the sons of God. An unawakened child of the devil sins willingly, one that is awakened sins unwillingly; a child of God "sinneth not," but "keepeth himself, and the wicked one toucheth him not." To conclude: the natural man neither conquers nor fights; the man under the law fights with sin, but cannot conquer; the man under grace fights and conquers, yea, is "more than conqueror, through him that loveth him."

IV. 1. From this plain account of the three-fold state of man, the natural, the legal, and the evangelical, it appears that it is not sufficient to divide mankind into sincere and insincere. A man may be sincere in any of these states; not only when he has the "Spirit of adoption," but while he has the "spirit of bondage unto fear;" yea, while he has neither this fear, nor love. For undoubtedly there may be sincere Heathens, as well as sincere Jews, or Christians. This circumstance, them does by no means prove, that, a man is in a state of acceptance with God.

"Examine yourselves, therefore," not only whether ye are sincere, but "whether ye be in the faith." Examine narrowly, (for it imports you much,) what is the ruling principle in your soul! Is it the love of God? Is it the fear of God? Or is it neither one nor the other? Is it not rather the love of the world? the love of pleasure, or gain? of ease, or reputation? If so, you are not come so far as a Jew. You are but a Heathen still. Have you heaven in your heart? Have you the Spirit of adoption, ever crying, Abba, Father? Or do you cry unto God, as "out of the belly of hell," overwhelmed with sorrow and fear? Or are you a stranger to this whole affair, and cannot imagine what I mean? Heathen, pull off the mask! Thou hast never put on Christ! Stand barefaced! Look up to heaven; and own before Him that liveth for ever and ever, thou hast no part, either among the sons of servants of God!

Whosoever thou art: Dost thou commit sin, or dost thou not? If thou dost, is it willingly, or unwillingly? In either case, God hath told thee whose thou art: "He that committeth sin is of the devil." If thou committest it willingly, thou art his faithful servant: He will not fail to reward thy labour. If unwillingly, still thou art his servant. God deliver thee out of his hands!

Art thou daily fighting against all sin? And daily more than conqueror? I acknowledge thee for a child of God. O stand fast in thy glorious liberty! Art thou fighting, but not conquering? striving for the mastery, but not able to attain? Then thou art not yet a believer in Christ; but follow on, and thou shalt know the Lord. Art thou not fighting at all, but leading an easy, indolent, fashionable life! O how hast thou dared to name the name of Christ, only to make it a reproach among the Heathen? Awake, thou sleeper! Call upon thy God before the deep swallow thee up!

2. Perhaps one reason why so many think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, why they do not discern what state they are in, is because these several states of soul are often mingled together, and in some measure meet in one and the same person. Thus experience shows, that the legal state, or state of fear, is frequently mixed with the natural; for few men are so fast asleep in sin, but they are sometimes more or less awakened. As the Spirit of God does not "wait for the call of man," so, at some times he will be heard. He puts them in fear, so that, for a season at least, the Heathen "know themselves to be but men." They feel the burden of sin, and earnestly desire to flee from the wrath to come. But not long: They seldom suffer the arrows of conviction to go deep into their souls; but quickly stifle the grace of God, and return to their wallowing in the mire.

In like manner, the evangelical state, or state of love, is frequently mixed with the legal. For few of those who have the spirit of bondage and fear, remain always without hope. The wise and gracious God rarely suffers this; "for he remembereth that we are but dust;" and he willeth not that "the flesh should fail before him, or the spirit which he hath made." Therefore, at such times as he seeth good, he gives a dawning of light unto them that sit in darkness. He cause a part of his goodness to pass before them, and shows he is a "God that heareth the prayer." They see the promise, which is by faith in Christ Jesus, though it be yet afar off; and hereby they are encouraged to "run with patience the race which is set before them."

3. Another reason why many deceive themselves, is, because they do not consider how far a man may go, and yet be in a natural, or, at best, a legal state. A man may be of a compassionate and a benevolent temper; he may be affable, courteous, generous, friendly; he may have some degree of meekness, patience, temperance, and of many other moral virtues. He may feel many desires of shaking off all vice, and of attaining higher degrees of virtue. He may abstain from much evil; perhaps from all that is grossly contrary to justice, mercy, or truth. He may do much good, may feed the hungry, clothe the naked, relieve the widow and fatherless. He may attend public worship, use prayer in private, read many books of

devotion; and yet, for all this, he may be a mere natural man, knowing neither himself nor God; equally a stranger to the spirit of fear and to that of love; having neither repented, nor believed the gospel.

But suppose there were added to all this a deep conviction of sin, with much fear of the wrath of God; vehement desires to cast off every sin, and to fulfill all righteousness; frequent rejoicing in hope, and touches of love often glancing upon the soul; yet neither do these prove a man to be under grace; to have true, living, Christian faith, unless the Spirit of adoption abide in his heart, unless he can continually cry, "Abba, Father!"

4. Beware, then, thou who art called by the name of Christ, that thou come not short of the mark of thy high calling. Beware thou rest, not, either in a natural state with too many that are accounted good Christians; or in a legal state, wherein those who are highly esteemed of men are generally content to live and die. Nay, but God hath prepared better things for thee, if thou follow on till thou attain. Thou art not called to fear and tremble like devils; but to rejoice and love, like the angels of God. "Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." Thou shalt "rejoice evermore;" thou shalt "pray without ceasing;" thou shalt "in everything give thanks." Thou shalt do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven. O prove thou "what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God!" Now present thyself "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God." "Whereunto thou hast already attained, hold fast," by "reaching forth unto those things which are before:" until "the God of peace make thee perfect in every good work, working in thee that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ: To whom be glory for ever and ever! Amen!"

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-wesley/the-spirit-of-bondage-and-of-adoption/>

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