

July 26

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE WAY OUT
FOURTH IN THE SERIES OF "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:9-17

Page 1

Today we begin looking at the good news! In the previous sermons of this series, you have had hints of the way out of the human condition of sin and death; but most of those sermons dealt with the situation in which we find ourselves. While a minister was greeting parishioners after the morning service, one woman shook his hand and gushed, "You're simply wonderful! Why, I never knew what sin was before you came here!" Yes, in the previous three sermons I talked a great deal about sin. Some thought it was depressing, but I feel it is critical for us to understand the kind of world in which we live and the struggle that is going on within each of us, the struggle between doing not what we want to do, but doing the very thing we don't want to do. If we haven't identified the problem, we can't very well understand or appropriate the solution; in fact, we might miss the solution because we fail to recognize it.

According to Paul, the human condition, in which we all live, is under the control of sin and death. But, there is a way out. There is a way that leads to the kingdom of God. The ideal, taught and lived by Jesus, is not only an alternative, but a solution, to the human dilemma. Our text this morning is Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." The Holy Spirit leads the way out, and the way out of the human dilemma is a whole new way of life, with new relationships, a new way of understanding your life, a new perspective, a new family. It's a new age. "It's an age of miracle," wrote C. H. Dodd in his classic, *The Meaning of Paul for Today* (pp. 135-136), "in which nothing is too good to be true."

The New Age is peace. Romans 5:1, "We have peace with God."

The New Age is forgiveness; you are free from condemnation. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation."

The New Age is morality; in the New Age you live differently. The values and ethics of the Old Age are discarded; you die to them, Paul says. This ethical dimension is somewhat unique to Paul's Christianity. Other religions--especially those of Paul's day--promise peace, forgiveness, and immortality; but, in Paul's experience, the Holy Spirit changes behavior as well. C. H. Dodd points out that popular religion in Paul's day believed that practicing a religious rite and subscribing to an esoteric doctrine, gave one assurance of immortality. However, "for Paul," Dodd wrote, (pg. 136) "the essential thing was a new moral character, as the only real evidence of a life akin to the life of God, and its means was the receiving of Christ, not by any magical rite, nor by assent to a system of doctrine, but in the moral fellowship of faith."

The New Age is also new relationships. Romans 8:14, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." The Holy Spirit adopts you into God's family. The way out--the New Age--is new relationships, a new family. The new relationship with God, taught and lived by Jesus, and enabled by the Holy Spirit, is adoption into the family of God. Barclay in his commentary points out that we really cannot understand the full impact of this metaphor until we understand what Roman adoption was like.

In Roman society the father had absolute power over his family; at one time it was actually the power of life and death. A Roman son never came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the absolute control, in the absolute possession of his father. The relationships in the contemporary

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE WAY OUT
FOURTH IN THE SERIES OF "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:9-17

Page 2

Mafia might have their origins in ancient Rome. Adoption was, therefore, a very difficult and a very serious step. In adoption, a person had to leave the possession and control of one father and enter into the equally absolute possession and control of the new father.

According to Barclay (pp. 110-111), there were four main consequences of adoption.

First, the adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate child in the new family. He got a new father.

Second, the adopted son became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were born into the family, it did not affect the adopted son's rights. He was inalienably coheir with them.

Third, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out. All debts were canceled. The adopted person was regarded as a new person entering into a new life on which the past had no bearing.

Fourth, in the eyes of the law the adopted person was literally the son of his new father. The Emperor Claudius adopted Nero so that Nero might succeed him as emperor; but when Nero wanted to marry Claudius' daughter, Octavia, who was now Nero's sister, the Roman senate had to pass legislation to enable Nero to marry his sister, even though they were not blood relations.

Likewise, the Holy Spirit adopts you into God's family where you are no longer possessed by sin and under the absolute control of your sinful human nature. The body, flesh, members--words which Paul uses to mean "human nature"--no longer have power. The old life is wiped out. Romans 8:15, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship." No longer are you slaves to your past, because you have now been adopted into God's family where God is in absolute control, and where you are possessed, not by sin, but by God.

Therefore, you have a new father, and can now cry, "Abba! Father!" (vs. 15) "Abba" is an Aramaic word, evidently used by Jesus who spoke the Aramaic language. "Abba" is an intimate term for "father," like "Daddy" or "Papa." Imagine! The way out of the human dilemma of sin and death is to enter into a new relationship with God where we experience God not only as Creator, Judge, Healer, Saviour, King, but as parent, as Daddy and Mama. The Holy Spirit will lead you into a warm, personal, intimate relationship with God. You can talk with God, ask advice and direction, ask for help and guidance, ask for affection and warmth. You can relax with God; as in a family, you can take off your shoes, discard that best behavior reserved for company or business dealings, and be yourself. You can laugh and enjoy your life.

You are loved. Some of you feel rejected by your own family, or cheated; but in God's family, you are loved. You can also be your best and live your best because you now have a family who believes in you, protects you, and helps you be your best. You will want to be an exemplary member of the family, not out of fear, but out of love and pride. Look who you are! You are a full member of God's family. Adopted, yes, but a full, bona fide, member of the family, with all the rights.

Paul continues in verse 16. When you enter this kind of relationship with God, the Spirit bears witness that you are a new, adopted child of God. In Rome the adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses.

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE WAY OUT
FOURTH IN THE SERIES OF "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:9-17

Page 3

If a dispute ever arose over the rights of the adopted child to inherit, one or more of the seven original witnesses would testify. Thus the rights of the adopted person were guaranteed. Paul says the Holy Spirit is our witness. When you doubt your rights as a child, when you doubt your place in God's family, when you doubt your salvation, when you say "I hope I'm a Christian," rather than an affirming, enthusiastic, sure, "Yes, I am a Christian"; then, the Holy Spirit will testify, "Hey, wait a minute. I'm a witness. You are a member of God's family, with full rights."

In the next verse, verse 17, Paul says your rights as an adopted child include the inheritance, the inheritance of God's glory, the inheritance of eternal life, the inheritance of the New Age. In fact, and this is incredible when you think about it, you are a fellow heir with Christ. Jesus, who is the "natural" child of God, now shares equally the inheritance with you, the adopted child of God. That is the promise. That is our hope and our confidence in the future.

Verse 17 concludes with the words, "provided we suffer with Christ." You share with Christ not only the inheritance, but the suffering, the responsibility, and the work. When adopted into God's family, you don't become a child with a golden spoon in your mouth--pampered, spoiled, and waited on. No, you soon discover you are a participating, contributing, working member of the family. Your talents, service and contribution are all desperately needed by God to support the family and to help it do God's work of redemption in this world. You are needed!

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God." Notice, your adoption is an act of God. It is an event.

Ernest Best in his commentary writes, (p.94) "it is not suggested here that we are children of God because he created us...The Spirit makes us children, creating a new relationship with God."

According to the Interpreters' Concise Commentary, (p. 149) "The Spirit is not only new moral energy by which Christians gain release from bondage to the flesh. It is a new relationship with God, a new high level of privilege."

C. H. Dodd wrote, (p. 140) "To have the Spirit does not mean...that some mysterious stream of divine essence is passing into the human organism. It means being in the most intimate conceivable touch with a Person."

A new relationship is created. You are put in touch, not with an entity, or an idea, or a rule, or a doctrine, but with a person--the warm, loving, caring, courageous Jesus, whom we now experience in spirit.

How does the Holy Spirit work? How does the Holy Spirit lead the way out? How does the Holy Spirit adopt you? The process is not automatic. A special event, an act, is required. Interpreter's Concise Commentary puts it like this, (p. 149)

Paul's doctrine seems to be that though God is the Father of all persons, all persons are not his children until they enter the experience of faith and are led, or motivated, by the Spirit. People need to be brought into this relationship.

You are not automatically a child of God. Somewhere, some time, somehow, you must make a conscious decision to ask for adoption. Sometimes the process

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE WAY OUT
FOURTH IN THE SERIES OF "THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:9-17

Page 4

is gradual, especially if you were raised in the church where the values of Christ were taught to you and practiced before you by your parents and church family. But even for those of you who were raised in the church, live good lives, and have never been "big sinners," there must come a time when you consciously recognize and rejoice in your adoption. And, throughout your life, when you are open to the Holy Spirit, there will come times of keen awareness of your new family, your new relationships, your new parent.

When you are adopted into God's family, and when you reflect on that adoption, you will realize it is not your doing. It is not something inside you that gradually grows into awareness. Nor, is your adoption the result of your manipulation of the Holy Spirit. It is an act of God by which you are captured. A good analogy is music. When a singer sings and is really in touch with the song, does the song belong to the singer or does the singer belong to the song? James Baldwin, in his book, *Just Above My Head*, wrote (p. 589)

The song does not belong to the singer. The singer is found by the song. Ain't no singer, anywhere, ever made up a song--that is not possible. He hears something. I really believe..that something hears him, something says, come here! and jumps on him just exactly like you jump on a piano or a sax or a violin or a drum and you make it sing the song you hear: and you love it, and you take care of it, better than you take care of yourself.

Like a song, the Holy Spirit calls, "Come here!" and even jumps on you, overpowers you, and fills you with love, joy and peace--when you allow. Brothers and sisters, are you on the way out of sin and death? Have you been adopted into God's family? Have you asked? Have you prayed, "Come, Holy Spirit. Have thine own way with my life. Hold o'er my being absolute sway?" If not, do it now.

THE HOLY SPIRIT LEADS THE WAY OUT
FOURTH IN THE SERIES ON
"THE WAY OUT" OF THE HUMAN DILEMMA
ROMANS 8:9-17

DOUGLAS NORRIS
FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

JULY 26, 1987