

Spirit of Sonship

Father's Day

June 20, 2010

A teacher asked her young class if anyone knew what Father's Day was. One little boy raised his hand and said, "It's just like Mother's Day ... but *cheaper*."



It's not until the *8th* chapter of Romans that Paul says:

... those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. - *Romans 8:14 NIV*

This is the first time Paul calls us "sons" (children) of God.

I think it's significant that it takes him over seven chapters of buildup (concerning God's wrath, judgment, and the law of sin and death) before he makes this statement.



A few verses before, Paul culminates all that's come before it with this classic Romans quote:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. - *Romans 8:1-2 NIV*

It's only after establishing this foundation that Paul can go on to explain how the Spirit of God makes us children of God. I believe that this is because ...

- It's dangerous to see God as Father *without* Christ as Savior.

False religions and New Age teachings commonly place an emphasis on God as Father with *no* mention of Christ as Redeemer. But, without the lens of Christ, our perception of the Father will be distorted. It's through Jesus that God's passionate love, absolute justice, and sacrificial grace converge and unite.

And only one connection gives us the right to become God's children:

To all who **received him**, to those who **believed in his name**, **he gave the right** to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. - *John 1:12-13 NIV*

Q: "Received" and "believed" who? Who's "Him"?!

A: Jesus! The only Son *begotten*, not made. (*John 1:18*).

Whenever we call God “Father,” we’re not just affirming that He *created* us. We’re declaring that, *through Christ*, He saved us!

In one respect *every human ever born is* His created “child”; but, as we all know there’s more to being a dad than creating a kid. After we’re created we must be connected.



Back in Romans, Paul goes on to say:

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.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. – *Romans 8:15-16 NIV*

Paul contrasts two key words here: “slave” and “sonship”. The term “sonship” is synonymous with “adoption. And, if you’ve adopted a child, you know that it is both a firm legal reality, as well as a full-hearted relational reality.

The Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of [adoption]” because these are the two realities he impresses upon us and within us.

1. First, the solid legal reality through Christ as my Savior.
2. Then, the unshakable relational reality of God as my Father.

Q: How does Paul tell us the Holy Spirit accomplishes this?

A: By replacing the fear of a slave with the love of a son.

In other words:

- Slave-like condemnation becomes child-like devotion.

Condemnation says: “I’m worthless and I *need* to do certain things in order to measure up.” But, devotion says: “To be more like my Father I *want* to do certain things in order to be more like Him!”

This is how we distinguish (discern) the whispers of affection and *conviction* of the Encourager, from the whispers of rejection and denunciation of the Accuser.

The Spirit doesn’t lead us by stirring up slavish fear, but by stirring up family affection.

Paul says: “And by [this Spirit] we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’”

The Greek word, “cry” conveys an impassioned *shouting* (like a child would do if they were lost). And the Aramaic word, “Abba,” is equivalent to our “Papa” or “Daddy.”



God Himself desires closeness with His creation; and it's important for us to remember why he created us, and how He chooses to be perceived:

- Our God is a Father not a force.

He's not some distant, detached, or impersonal power, which is why Jesus opens His model prayer the way He does:

This, then, is how you should pray: "Our **Father** in heaven, hallowed be your name ..." - *Matthew 6:9 NIV*



In all 39 books of the O.T., written over 1400 years, God is called "Father" about 14 times. That's once per 100 years! And then it's mostly as the Father of a nation and *not* the individual. But, Jesus, in the book of John *alone*, within 3 years, refers to God as "Father" over 120 times!

And, notice how Jesus places the personal ownership in there. He doesn't just begin with, "Father", but with "Our" Father.



He's *ours!* He belongs to *us*, just as *we* belong to *Him*. Not in a selfish sense, but in the same way a child possesses the heart of a loving parent.

- And, in that same way, we *own* His heart.

But, a whole lot of believers have a *huge* barrier when it comes to connecting with God as their Heavenly Father. Can you guess the main reason for this? Their *earthly* father!



For many, "Father" is synonymous with hostility and rejection and abuse; and the feelings we associate with it are repulsion, anger and scorn.

- Bad dads warp our perception of the Father.

We all tend to project the weaknesses of our fathers onto God.



If dad was unreasonable or unpleasable, we can unconsciously transfer those attributes to God.

If he was unreliable, unconcerned, unpredictable, or unjust we'll project *those* traits instead.

Here's what we need to realize: Jesus wasn't looking for a warm, fuzzy metaphor to humanize an otherwise indescribable being.

He didn't look back on His happy childhood memories of fishing with Joseph (His own dad) and think, "Yeah ... God is like *that*."



God is not "like" a father. God isn't a reflection of all-that-is-good about *human* fatherhood; rather, all that is good about human fatherhood is a reflection of *Him*!

- God is the *standard* for all fatherhood!

And all human fathers should be measured by, judged by, and will ultimately fall short of the one and only *genuine* definition of *Father*.

Jesus uses this term, because in its *most* inspiring and gracious sense, it is the *essence* of who He *Himself* is! It's fundamental to His nature and unique to His relationship with His creation.

Jesus is more than the *way* to the Father.

Jesus is *one* with the Father!

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." - *John 14:6-7 NIV*

Paul has established that it's *by* the Holy Spirit that we can call out to God as "Abba, Father". This is fascinating, because when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he said that ...

... no one can say, "**Jesus is Lord,**" except **by the Holy Spirit.** - *1 Corinthians 12:3 NIV*



The Spirit produces two profound changes in us:

1. An obedient submission to Jesus as Lord
2. A child-like cry to God as Abba, Father

One cannot properly exist without the other.

When we see Jesus as Lord, the Spirit can lead us into battle with our sin, to put to death all that does not exalt our Savior.

And, when we see God as Papa, or Daddy, or Abba, the Spirit can motivate us with the affection and conviction of sons and daughters who desire nothing more than honoring their Father.