

Guest Preacher - Rev. Callum Macleod (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev Callum Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn together to Romans and chapter number 8, and we can read at verse 15!
Romans 8 and verse 15.

For 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, and so on down through the following verses. As I referred to in the address to the children, our identity is really important to us. Who are we and why are we here?

And our identity is the unique characteristics that identify us as people. You have your identity, I have mine.

Our identity is not the same. Our identity is made up of the unique characteristics that make us who we are. And the thing with our identity is the fact that it does not change.

[1 : 18] It's not affected by circumstances. Who I am today is not going to change because of something that I may go through tomorrow.

And so often we think that because of certain things happening to us, that it changes who we are. And in God's grace, it makes us better people.

But it does not change our identity. And we know that in the world in which we live, that there is confusion about this whole idea of identity.

The confusion that shows itself in the way in which people think they can choose their identity and change their identity and be people that they are not.

Forgetting that identity is something that is given to us, not something that we choose for ourselves. It's fundamental to our existence in this world to have and to know our identity and to understand that as those who are created in God's image, that our identity is given to us by God.

[2 : 38] And I'm saying that because there is a crisis of identity in this church in Rome. And Paul is trying to address that crisis.

And it is to do with that identity as the children of God. And as I mentioned to the children, there are at least two groups that Paul is addressing here in this letter.

And the first of these groups is made up of those who think, who have a high opinion of themselves. They're good. They're righteous.

They're good enough for God. And because they have a high opinion of themselves, they don't need to hear about the Lord Jesus Christ and what God has done in Him.

A high opinion of yourself will exclude the Lord Jesus and will give you a life that shuts Him out. And the other issue was that there were those who were real Christians and they didn't understand that they were.

[3 : 50] And that's really sad that you can be here today and in the eyes of God, you are the child of God and yet you don't have the comfort of that in your own experience.

You don't have the assurance. And I guess that wherever the church is found, in Rome, in Barros, wherever we go, in the experience of the church, these two groups are present to a greater or lesser degree.

And bearing that in mind, I want to think today of Christian identity and our status as the sons of God.

I want to think first of all of confusion. And the confusion surrounds what these people have received.

And when we read receive in the Bible, it reminds us that we are passive and God comes to us. He comes to us with His grace.

[4 : 58] He comes to us with His love. He comes to us with His Holy Spirit. And the picture that we have here is of a people in whose heart the Spirit of God dwells.

I think of a dwelling and I think of my home. I go home to my house. This is where I live. But here in the way in which God works in the lives of His own children, He makes their hearts a home for His Holy Spirit.

And they are passive in this moment when God comes, opens the door of our hearts and minds, and comes to dwell by the presence and power of His Holy Spirit.

And in that moment, we are, what Paul describes, a new creation. The Spirit of God that we receive and comes to dwell in us.

And there is much that could be said about the Holy Spirit of God, but two things that we can say from this passage itself and from the wider message of the Bible.

[6 : 16] The first thing is that when that Spirit of God comes, we have freedom. It's getting out of jail time. And it's getting out of the jail where we were trapped because of our sin under the judgment of God, under His condemnation, and worthy of His wrath and curse forever.

And when the Spirit of God comes, He takes me out of that prison house. He sets me free. And He places my feet on a curse of a life of freedom through faith in Jesus Christ.

And the second thing that the Holy Spirit does, He shows me the beauty of Jesus. That's what Jesus said to His disciples. He will take the things that belong to me, and He will show them to you. And today, if you are the child of God, there will be, there should be a sense of freedom.

There will certainly be a sense of being attracted to the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot be the child of God without having a desire for the Lord Jesus.

[7 : 40] To get to know Him. To get to know Him better. And to live for Him. The Spirit that shows Jesus to us.

The Spirit that sets us free. But there was a confusion. And the confusion is that you did not receive the Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.

The Spirit that brings freedom to them. They began to read it as the Spirit of slavery. They were falling back into the experience of life and their understanding of life that they had before the Spirit of God came to dwell into their hearts.

Instead of being free, they felt as if they were slaves. And we read the history of the people of God in the Old Testament, and Paul himself in this letter refers to them as those who were slaves, those who were the servants of sin.

But now, things have changed, set free from the servants of sin to give our lives in the service of Christ.

[9 : 02] Falling back into slavery. What was the problem? What is the issue? They were falling back into their kind of default position where they thought that they must obey the law of God perfectly in order to be the children of God.

The very thing that God had rescued them from, they were falling back into it. So instead of living a life that trusted entirely on what Jesus had done for them, they were living a life that was performance related.

And their performance in keeping the law of God was the only way in which they were going to have their freedom and to know that they were the children of God. And we know the outcome of that kind of living.

We're never going to perform to the level that God will accept us because of what we do, because of our law keeping, because we have sin in our hearts and perfection in the performance that we're looking for simply cannot be achieved.

And the fact of the matter is that today, as it was in the days of Paul and the church in Rome, that today one of Satan's greatest strategies is to convince you and me that we need to keep the law of God perfectly before we can be saved.

[10 : 49] Whether it's salvation through Christ plus or simply salvation that is based on works, it is one of Satan's greatest strategy.

And God wants to tell you and to me today that we need to be on our guard against the confusion that Satan creates in our thinking to the extent that we lose the experience, the joy, the satisfaction of our salvation.

And we go around with a heavy heart and with guilt in our consciences because we cannot reach the perfection that we are looking for.

Instead of enjoying, experiencing and living the life that flows from having our sins forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ and being set free as we have in the beginning of this chapter, being set free

to fulfill the righteous requirement of the law, set free to walk in the paths of God and of the Spirit of God.

The confusion. How far might it be true today for you that God has worked in your heart and in your life but that Satan has robbed you of the assurance of that work having taken place and instead you are filled with sadness every day because you cannot reach the perfection that Satan has persuaded you is necessary in order to enjoy the freedom of the children of God.

[12:42] Our identity as the children of God and the confusion. Secondly, we have our identity as the children of God and our status as the children of God and the correction.

How does Paul address this? Well, he reminds them that that's not what they have received. That God hasn't given to them what brings them back to slavery.

That instead of that he has given to you the spirit of adoption. What the spirit brings is not slavery. What the spirit brings and what comes into our hearts he brings the sense of adoption. That sense of being taken from one family into another family.

And I go to Rome in the days of Paul and I ask myself, what did these people understand from what Paul was saying about adoption? And I think there are two things that they would have understood.

[13:49] And the first of these is that in the Roman culture and because of the way in which a male child was really important in the structure of family and in the structure of the religion it was really important that parents had a male child.

And if they did not there was provision, legal provision so that they could adopt a son from another family, take the son into their own family to have the same status and rights and privileges of a natural son and there to be an heir in the family line.

The continuity of this family was dependent upon the legal right to adopt a son in these kind of circumstances. The second thing is that as they were taught from the Bible, they would understand that God said to Moses in Exodus chapter 4, my people whom I have come to save from Egypt, my covenant people, Israel is my firstborn.

Let my son go. And Paul is telling them in Rome, this is the spirit that you have received.

It's the spirit that provides continuity in the life of the church of Jesus Christ. As God builds his church, in every generation, there are those like yourselves that God calls and God places his spirit in their hearts.

[15:36] They become the children of God. And so that by the grace of God and in the purpose of God, the continuity of the church of Christ never terminates, comes to an end.

God will always have his witness. And along with that, there is a sense of becoming the sons of God, the children of God.

Jesus himself being the son of God. The king in Israel was the son of God. You are my father, says the psalmist, speaking about the Messiah and Psalm 89, you are my father, you are my God alone. It's a sonship that God gives to us, that we share with the Lord Jesus, that we are alongside of him and that we share that status with him as those who are the children of God.

And in that sense of correcting them, how are they going to recognize that this is what happens? In the confusion in their minds, they are going to recognize this by the simple cry that they have, that this is the spirit of adoption of sons by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

[17:13] and the sense of crying, Abba, Father. It's not the sense of quietly weeping in a corner, hiding my tears.

It's not that kind of crying. It's the kind of crying that we hear a screaming newborn child crying, reaching out, longing for his mother, for him to be fed and comforted and loved.

It's that cry that draws attention, that arises because there is new life there, and it's directed towards the mother, the parent of this child.

And so Paul is telling them that here is how you will recognize that the spirit of adoption is in your hearts.

You will have this conversation with God as your father. It's the conversation of prayer. It's crying out to him, and as you reach out to him, recognizing that he is your father, father, that however that may be veiled in your understanding, the cry is there because the father is there, and because you are his child.

[18:40] And wherever the spirit of God is, there is that conversation, there is that prayer, there is that line of communication. Read through the book of Psalms.

How often the psalmist cried out to God in his trouble. How often the Lord comes to rescue him and shows him to be his rock and his salvation.

We go to Jesus himself on the way to the cross at Calvary. He's in the garden. He knows who his father is.

to take this cup away from me if it is possible. He has the spirit of God in his heart. He has that conversation. He has that commune.

He is crying out. What is he crying? Abba, Father. The cry of the older son in God's family.

[19 : 48] As he cries out to God in his cries is going to the cross, reaching out for the help of God. The result of which he was able to rise from there and to go forward in the strength of God.

Rise, let us go from here. The cup that the father has given to me, will I not drink it? Of course I will. The same cry as the Lord Jesus.

The cry which brought success to the Lord Jesus in his mission as the servant of God that brought him to the triumph of the cross and the triumph of the resurrection.

So it is for you today if you are the child of God, the spirit of adoption, crying.

Sometimes circumstances in life we try and hold back our tears. We try and contain the sense of need that we have instead of letting it out.

[21 : 03] Sometimes as the children of God we do exactly the same. Instead of letting go and showing by your cry who we are, we try and contain it and hide it.

And today God wants us to recognize the spirit of God in our hearts. He wants us to recognize that from the way in which we turn to God and cry to him in every time of need.

And he wants us to let that sense of conversation with God, that prayer life with God, to let that drive out any confusion and to let us be settled in our relationship with God as the children of God coming to the God who is our Father.

There is confusion, there is correction, and thirdly there is confirmation.

God wants us to know that he loves us. He's not the kind of God that works in our lives and withdraws himself so that we are miserable instead of enjoying what he has done for us.

[22 : 33] That's not what God does. He wants us to understand and to know and to experience what he has done in our lives. What does Paul tell us here?

What does Paul tell them here? In verse number 16, the Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

There are two persons in this sense of confirmation. And the first person, the person who has the priority is that same Spirit of God, who himself is God, and who ministers to our every need, and who gives us the sense of trusting in God as our Father.

There is the Spirit of God. Then there is their own spirit, or your own spirit, or my own spirit.

God. That is the sense that we have of who we are and what we are. And Paul in the first Corinthians in chapter 2 speaks about that very same thing.

[23 : 47] He speaks about the way in which no one knows the thoughts of a person except the spirit of that person is in him. Right now, you have exclusive access to what is going on in your mind and in your heart.

No one knows that but you alone. You have exclusive right to that. And you and the Holy Spirit are together here in this confirmation picture that Paul has.

And the confirmation comes about because there is a witness and there is the one who is hearing the testimony.

And the one who is witnessing is the Holy Spirit of God who is bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.

And to put it simply, what does a witness do? A witness recalls a historical event and the things that happened in that event and he presents these facts to those who are gathered to assess, to judge what has taken place in the past.

[25 : 09] Historical event, a person who saw and viewed and a person who is able to bring the facts at a later date. And here is the Holy Spirit of God, the spirit of adoption who is dwelling in our hearts as the children of God.

who knows the historical event of the death of Jesus, the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus, the historical event of that moment in your life and mine when he made us the children of God, when he came to dwell in our hearts.

The three key events that change their experience and the spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God based on these three events which he brings before us.

And the challenge that you and I face is that when the confirmation is available to us, that in the courtroom of our minds that there is so much clutter and so much busyness and perhaps so much worldliness and the effects of the movement of secularism that we simply cannot hear the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

and I know for myself, as I'm sure you will know for yourself, what I mean by that busyness, that we go through life from Lord's day to Lord's day, we're carried along with so much that happens around us.

[27 : 02] I don't need to have access to the things that are going on in the world. And by having that access and gaining that access, filling your minds with things that are contrary to this very message that Paul is telling us, that God is telling us, goes on in our hearts.

And it begs the question, do you know today that you are the child of God? Are you sure that you are the child of God?

Or are you unsure? Are you filled with doubts that you ever became the child of God? And if the answer to that last question is yes, then there is a project for you to undertake.

And the project is one of decluttering your mind, of decluttering life, of removing all of the intrusions that have built up in your life and in your mind, there is a project that you must be engaged in, I must be engaged in, all of the people of God must be engaged in, to take away the noise, the noise from out there, to put it back outside there, to shut the door, and to listen to what God is saying, to what God has done, to what God is doing today.

And what a blessing it would be if you and I went home from this time of worship today, and we went home and we were able with God's help to think about God, and to exclude the things that get in the way of God in our lives, and to have a fresh start in our Christian journey, so that the confusion is gone, that we have responded to God's correction, and that we live the life of knowing that we are the children of God.

[29 : 20] And when you read on in this chapter, what does that mean? It means that the Spirit of God helps me today and tomorrow and every day of my life. It also means that I know where I'm going.

It also means that because the Spirit of God helps me, I will get safely there. And there's nothing in this world that can reach that level of peace and of assurance that surpasses everything else in life, that I know God is my Father, that I know He cares for me every day, and I know that one day I will be with my Father, and I will be with my Savior, and I will be there with all of the people of God.

And that God blesses word to us and may grant us together to arrive in that place and to journey on with the assurance of God's love and His care and His oversight every step of life's way.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. God, most gracious God, we do give thanks to you for your love and for your grace and for every way in which you bring about change in our lives.

We pray that you will help us to change who we are in the sense of making ourselves more receptive to your word, making sure that we have a clear channel of communication with you and so being able to live as your children in this world, with your joy in our hearts, with your peace, the peace that passes understanding and with that sense of direction and purpose each day that we live here in this world.

[31 : 01] Bless your word as we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. So now we're going to praise God from Psalm number 103. It's in Sing Psalms and it's on page 135.

Psalm 103 on page 135 and we're going to sing from verse 8 to the verse 14. 8 to 14.

The Lord is merciful and kind, to anger slow and full of grace. He will not constantly reprove or in his anger hide his face. From verse 8 to verse 14 to God's praise.

The Lord is merciful and kind. To anger slow and full of grace, he will not constantly reprove, or in his anger hide his face.

He does not punish our mistakes, or give our sins their just reward.

[32 : 20] How great is love as high as heaven towards all those who fear the Lord.

Towards all those who fear the Lord. love is from the west, so far his love has poured away, our many sins and trespasses, and all the guilt that on us sway.

just as a father loves his child, so God loves those who fear his name, for he remembers we are gods, and well he knows our feeble frame, and well he knows our feeble frame.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more. Amen.
Thank you.