

The Bible says that if we've been born again, we're adopted into God's family. It's a phrase we sing, say often, know in our heads: *I am a child of God*. But do we really know what that means? The privilege of it?

Truthfully, I struggle with this. I can't fully wrap my mind around being a child of the all-holy God. This is where the Holy Spirit helps us. Verse 16 is a promise: *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."*

The Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of adoption." In the New Testament, adoption means being placed as an adult son. We come into God's family by birth, but instantly God gives us the full standing of a son. Under ancient Roman law, an adopted son immediately received full inheritance rights, which is why verse 17 says what it does.

So how do we know we've really been adopted? Paul gives us four pieces of evidence.

1. The Spirit Leads Us Into Holiness

Verse 14 says, *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God."* Last week we looked at the abundant life the Spirit gives, and this verse tells us what that life looks like. Not health, wealth, and prosperity. Holiness. Daily sanctification, becoming a little more like Jesus.

That means daily hearing the Spirit's prompting to put to death the sins we easily entertain. Start each day inviting him to set a watch over your eyes, ears, hands, tongue, and feet, and you'll be prompted and convicted.

But the Spirit's work is gentle. He doesn't beat us over the head; he prompts. That's how a loving father leads his children. Yelling might produce short-term compliance, but a child raised that way eventually rebels. Our Heavenly Father leads with love, as David knew: *"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go"* (Psalm 32:8).

The child of God is willingly led by the Spirit. As we yield to him, he guides us by his Word. We're not under bondage to law and fear. We're free to come boldly, as dearly loved children, before our Father's throne (Hebrews 4:16).

2. The Spirit Replaces Fear With Freedom

"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!'" (Romans 8:15).

In first-century Greco-Roman culture, an adopted son was chosen to inherit the estate and

carry on the family name, with zero inferiority to a naturally born child. Paul uses slavery the way he does in Galatians 4: slavery represents our pre-Christ life; sonship, our new life in Christ.

In the old life, we feared punishment for sin. In the new life, we live in freedom, because of a loving relationship. Salvation is a total change of status: dead, now alive; enemies of God, now children of God.

That's not an easy transition. A newborn doesn't open its eyes and say, "Hi, Dad." A child learns who their father is by someone pointing, saying, "*this is Daddy*," until eventually they say it themselves. Same with us: after the new birth, the Spirit points to the Father and says, *this is your Heavenly Father*.

3. The Spirit Prompts Us to Call God Father

Paul writes "Abba, Father" in two languages, Abba in Aramaic, Father in Greek (*patēr*), perhaps deliberately including both Jew and Gentile in the privilege of calling God Father.

"Abba" was an everyday word, closer to "Daddy." No Jew would have dared address God that way, but Jesus did it constantly, teaching his disciples to pray "Our Father." That was new. Controversial, even.

What Jesus modeled, and Paul echoes, is that we can come to the Father with the boldness of a young child. A child yelled at comes with fear. A child who's known love comes boldly, asking for what's on their heart. When did you last ask God that way?

Notice the phrase: "*by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'*" Some read this as a cry, not a whisper, something rising from deep in the soul, unable to be held down. A slave doesn't cry out like that. Only a child does.

Verse 16 confirms it: "*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.*" Per Romans 5:5, that's because "*God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*" One of his roles is to give us that inward assurance. Pause, do you know how much God loves you? Really?

4. The Spirit Is the First Fruit of Our Inheritance

Verse 17: "*and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him.*"

We usually think of inheritance as something after death, our eternal reward,

"imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1 Peter 1:4). True. But Paul may be pointing to something even better. What if God himself is our inheritance? As Andrew Murray put it, "it is difficult to suppress the richer and deeper thought that God himself is the inheritance of his children." Every cell in our being was made to experience the pleasure of God's presence. There's no greater reward than that.

But the verse ends with a qualifier we don't love: *provided we suffer with him*. That doesn't mean a cross. It means if you follow Jesus and never feel the ache of a broken world, it's worth asking whether you truly know him. Jesus suffered daily, grieving over what sin does (Isaiah 53:3). We live between his first coming and his second, and suffering is part of that age. God uses it to refine and draw us closer. We don't suffer alone; we have a brother tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15).

So, are you living in the blessing of your adoption?

Do you relate to God as Abba, Father? Or still living like a slave, in fear?