

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

60. ON ADOPTION

How rich, how varied are the blessings of redemption! Like the gracious Giver, they are infinite and eternal, reaching from everlasting to everlasting. Fully to know the gifts of grace, we must know the fullness of him from whom they flow. Surely gratitude ought to swell our hearts, when we contemplate the author of our mercies, and the abject worms on whom those mercies are bestowed.

Happy is that heart which can appreciate the love of Jesus, and to which the Savior is increasingly precious. Thus to feel, is heaven begun; and form one of the brightest evidences of adoption into the family of God.

According to the natural order of things, we are first made the children of God; and then we receive the spirit of children. This is in perfect accordance with Scripture; "you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus;" and "because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father." For "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." Hence "he that believes on the Son of God, has the witness in himself;" the indwelling Spirit testifying to his spirit, or conscience, that he is a child of God; for thus says John; "hereby we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us." Therefore, filial affections towards God as our covenant Father, produced in the soul by the Holy Spirit, constitute the Spirit of adoption, and prove us to be his redeemed children.

This delightful feeling of sonship, with all its attendant blessedness, creates a peace and joy, such as a loving child experiences in the society and under the smiles of an affectionate parent. But we must never forget that this state of heart is not the mere effect of contemplating the change which may have passed upon us. When we look into ourselves, we find continual need for the deepest humiliation, even when we can praise God for his distinguishing mercy towards us.

Our peace and joy are the fruits of faith in the blood of Christ, wrought in us through the mighty power of God. We can have peace and joy only through believing. But as we become the children of God by faith, so true peace in the conscience, and joy in the heart, can only be maintained and increased through an abiding reliance on the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

From this foundation arises a sacred edifice of heavenly graces. "Don't you know," says the apostle, that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, who you have of God; and you are not your own, for you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." All the delightful experiences of true believers are inseparably connected with the witness of the Spirit. For though, for perspicuity's sake, we may endeavor to speak of them as so many steps ascending to the highest privileges of the Gospel, yet they are so blended together, that to separate them would be like separating the superstructure of a building from its foundation, or disjoining the members of a beautifully formed body.

Every grace of the Spirit has its counterfeit in the hypocrite.

Oh! what need we have to pray for wisdom "to try things which differ." All joy is not the fruit of the Spirit. "The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment." All peace is not the peace of God. "When they shall say, Peace, then sudden destruction comes upon them."

The enemy of souls can sow his tares, which at a distance may appear like true wheat; while, on closer inspection, they are found to be destitute of the precious grain. The renewed mind, on the contrary, unfolds its native excellencies the more minutely it is viewed; just as the insect and the flower spread before us their exquisite forms and beauties in proportion to the power of the lens.

Thus the more we become acquainted with a real child of God, the more of the divine image we shall discover. Humility, love, and purity will equally spread before us their beauties, and prove that the workmanship is of God.

What remains of fallen nature will, indeed be uncouth and forbidding; but what is of God will be attractive and delightful. Oh! that my heart may be molded into this lovely image! There is in the blessed Jesus every thing to kindle our love to the highest flame. Lord, inflame my whole heart with constant, fervent love to you.

Some professors of religion consider every affection short of ecstasy as worth nothing. Hence many, it is, to be feared, substitute mere animal excitement for joy in the Holy Spirit; and thus deceive themselves.

A person may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, have much of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and yet, not be able, from some mental cause, to exercise that filial confidence towards God in which the Spirit of adoption in a great measure consists; although none can possess the Spirit, without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

Others, from some peculiar temperament of body, may be prevented from feeling high transports of joy, while, at the same time, they can taste the sweets of inward serenity and composedness of mind. Others again, from a deep view of their own corruption, cannot or dare not recognize in themselves a holy conformity to God, though they hate sin and truly love the Savior.

Now, shall we say that such characters have not the Spirit's witness, because they cannot feel this ecstasy of

delight? Must the work of the Spirit be overlooked, in the absence of rapturous feeling? Shall we make those sad whom the Lord has not made sad? Oh how needful it is, for the enjoyment of true comfort, to place our experience on the right foundation!

Now, if joy, which is the Christian's delightful privilege, be the effect of the Spirit's witness, rather than the witness itself; then the humble follower of Jesus who has the testimony of his conscience, that he has chosen God for his portion, and cleaves wholly to his Savior for righteousness and strength, ought not to despond because he cannot rise to those heights of joy, which some favored believers are permitted to attain. He may, however, and he ought, to take courage, from this inward witness of the Spirit to his conscience, to aspire after so happy a state of mind, which conduces so much to the glory of God, and to the spiritual growth of his own soul; for "the joy of the Lord is our strength."

May we not then conclude, that, when joy overflows the heart through a lively sense of redeeming grace, it forms a sunshine in the soul; and that when this joy is accompanied with love, and confidence, and reverence, and trust in God, we have the Spirit of adoption in its most genuine exercise? We also perceive, that joyful emotions arising from some powerful impression or animal excitement, may be transient, as is evident from the stony ground hearer, who anon received the word with joy, but in time of temptation fell away.

It is to guard against such a delusion as this, that we should endeavor to form a solid and scriptural basis on which to repose our hopes and consolations. Joy may be unhallowed, but submissive obedience to the will of God cannot. How important, and yet how determinate, is the declaration of Paul "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Am I led by the Spirit of God?—Oh! how much of happiness is contained in the right answer to this question. The Spirit leads the sinner to the foot of the cross. Have I ever reached that place of mercy? The Spirit leads the sinner from the love of sin to the love of holiness. Do I abhor whatever is contrary to the mind of my Redeemer; and seek my happiness in the performance of his will?

The Spirit leads the soul from the vanities of the world, to the enjoyment of momentous Gospel blessings. Have I been graciously withdrawn in heart and affection from an evil world, and led into the purifying delights of fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ?

How blessed is the Spirit of adoption; that childlike Spirit which enables us to come to our heavenly Father, neither doubting his power, nor distrusting his grace. When we consider our weakness and his strength, our needs and his fullness, we may well feel happy while possessing in all its vigor this Spirit of adoption.

Sickness may invade our frame; poverty may diminish our substance; friends may prove unfaithful; yes, even Satan may harass our minds; and sin, dwelling within us, may lust and rebel; yet with God, the Great God; as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, we shall rise superior to every grief and loss; and feel and maintain a peace which the world can neither give nor take away.

While in this happy frame of mind, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. But if we are children, then we are heirs; and—Oh! amazing thought! surpassing human intellect to conceive—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!—heirs of that Being, whom Abraham styles "the possessor of heaven and earth"—and joint-heirs with that Savior, who declared, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Surely, then, with delightful propriety might the apostle say, "all things are yours, for you are Christ's, and Christ is God's."

Are the children of God, while thus exalted in privileges, exempt from affliction? Ah no!—while here below, they must tread the path of suffering—the path by which the blessed Jesus went to glory; for it is added, "if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."

Oh you adorable Savior, may I never shrink from bearing your cross, when called to endure it; if I suffer with you, I shall also reign with you. But who is sufficient for these things? Of myself; I am perfect weakness; but in you there is fullness of strength, and through faith; in you I shall assuredly overcome.

Oh! that I may daily possess this sacred evidence of my adoption into your family; an evidence which will stand the test of trial and temptation; which will keep me humble in prosperity, patient in affliction, peaceful in death, and joyful through eternity. Impart this blessing for your own mercies' sake, my only Helper and Deliverer.

You happy souls, the Savior praise,
Whose grace has made you sons of God;
To him devote your fleeting days,
Who bought you with his precious blood.
With childlike confidence repose
Each care on his paternal breast,
Whose love nor end nor measure knows;
The center of eternal rest.
How sweet to dwell beneath his shade,
Removed far from toil and care;
Where none can make the soul dismayed
That seeks and finds its refuge there.
Unite my heart, dear Lord, to You,
To You be every moment given;

ON ADOPTION

**On earth may I your goodness see,
Your glory in the highest heaven.**