

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Romans 8:13-17      “The Blessings of Being a Child of God”

Intro. Billy Graham told the story that Albert Einstein was once traveling from Princeton on a train when the conductor came down the aisle, punching the tickets of each passenger. When he came to Einstein, Einstein reached in his vest pocket. He couldn't find his ticket, so he reached in his other pocket. It wasn't there, so he looked in his briefcase but couldn't find it. Then he looked in the seat by him. He couldn't find it. The conductor said, “Dr. Einstein, I know who you are. We all know who you are. I'm sure you bought a ticket. Don't worry about it.” Einstein nodded appreciatively.

The conductor continued down the aisle punching tickets. As he was ready to move to the next car, he turned around and saw the great physicist down on his hands and knees looking under his seat for his ticket. The conductor rushed back and said, “Dr. Einstein, Dr. Einstein, don't worry. I know who you are. No problem. You don't need a ticket. I'm sure you bought one.” Einstein looked at him and said, “Young man, I too know who I am. What I don't know is where I'm going.”<sup>1</sup>

Do you know where you are going in life? Do you know where you will spend eternity? In this text of Scripture, Paul gives a test to help you know where your eternal destiny will be. He warns in v.13, “For if you live according to the flesh you will die...” Do you understand the significance of this warning? If the sin nature is in control of your life, you are about to die, and you will spend eternity separated from God. But then Paul gives a promise in the last of v.13, “but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” Paul shows in the context that the true Christian is led & enabled by the Spirit to deal a death blow to sin, and he keeps on putting to death the sinful deeds of the body.

This morning I am going to share with you several other ways you can know that you are a child of God, and that you are going to heaven. Then, I will show you some of the privileges of being a child of God. So the first thing I want you to do is this:

### I. MAKE SURE YOU ARE A CHILD OF GOD

The apostle John assures his Christian readers, “Beloved now we are the sons of God” (1 John 3:2). He also said in that same epistle, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life...” (5:13). We need to know for certain that we are children of God. Otherwise, if you doubt your salvation, you will lose much of your joy. You may not avail yourself of some of the blessings of salvation. So note with me how you can know for sure that you are a son of God. I'm going to give you 5 tests. First, you are a child of God:

A. If You Are Led by the Spirit – Paul says in v.14, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.” Before you can be led by the Spirit, you must first be indwelt by the Spirit. Well v.9 teaches that every true child of God has the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit wants to have an active role in leading your life. The word carries with it the idea that the one who leads

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<sup>1</sup> Told by Billy Graham in Jan. 2000 before community leaders in Charlotte, North Carolina.

us really accompanies us. It is also a present tense, which means that the Holy Spirit is seeking to lead us day by day on a regular basis.

There are many ways that the Holy Spirit leads us. I believe the Holy Spirit leads through circumstances. He opens & closes doors. He may lead us through the godly counsel of others. But the most reliable way the Spirit leads us is by the Word of God. He will never lead you contrary to the Word of God. Notice with me what He does to lead us by God's Word. First, He lead us:

1. By Illumination of the Word - He helps us to understand the God's Word, so He can lead us by His Word. Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:14 that "the things of the Spirit of God... are spiritually discerned." The apostle John said in 1 Jn. 2:27, "But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true..." So the Holy Spirit helps us to understand the Word of God so He can lead us. The Bible is like a road map through life. The Spirit will use the Bible to show you the right way to live.

Last November I purchased a great new product. It is a Tom Tom One, a mobile GPS device. I just key in my destination, & it gives me step-by-step driving directions to my destination from above. A pleasant voice says, "Turn left" or "Turn right" or "Go straight on." I no longer get lost. Even so, when we trust in the Lord, He gives us guidance from above. You can avoid getting lost on the highway of life if you are led by the Spirit of God.

The Holy Spirit will do His part, but you and I must do our part. The Spirit can use God's Word to lead us only as we read it, study it, understand it with His help, and even memorize it. If you do your part, the Holy Spirit will lead you by bringing applicable Scripture verses to mind at the right time.

The Spirit will also lead us:

2. By Applying God's Word - Once the Holy Spirit has shown us what God's Word says, He assists us in applying what we've learned. The Psalmist said, "Direct my steps by Your word, And let no iniquity have dominion over me" (Psa. 119:133). He not only illumines our minds, but He also stirs our hearts and wills. There is something in you that leads you to do right, and convicts you not to do wrong, or yield to temptation. In fact, Paul indicates in v.13 that the Spirit will lead you "put to death the [sinful] deeds of the body." Likewise, Paul said in Gal. 5:16, "Walk in the spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Are you led by the Spirit? Is He leading you by the Word of God? Is He leading you away from sin, and toward righteousness? If so, that is a good indication that you are a child of God.

There's another way you can know you are a child of God:

B. If the Holy Spirit Assures You of Your Adoption by God – Paul says in v.15, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption..." We have not gone from being slaves of sin to mere slaves of God. We have been adopted by God. Today, some people have some negative ideas about adoption. But such was not the case in Paul's day, especially in Roman society. The word "adoption" literally means, "To place as a son." Every Roman man wanted to have a son, who would inherit his name and his property. But sometimes a man would have an unworthy, rebellious son or perhaps he would not have any sons at all. So in such cases a man would often go and find someone to adopt as his son. He would often be a youth or young adult who had already demonstrated good character. Sometimes a man would even adopt his male slave that had gained his favor. An adopted son was no way inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature. Rather, he had a very favorable standing in Roman society. In fact, adopted was to be confirmed with at least 7 witnesses. The reason many witnesses were required

was to prevent the natural children in a family from denying the adopted child a share of the inheritance when the father died.

Even so, the Holy Spirit is God's witness within you that you have been adopted into the family of God.

Now this leads to another good evidence of being a true child of God. You are a child of God:

C. If You Have Learned to Recognize God as Father - Notice in the last of v.15 that by the Spirit "we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" Likewise, Gal. 4:6 says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'" The word "cry" is from the Greek word *krazo*, which means "to cry loudly with deep emotion." Our cry "Father" is the witness that we are sons. That cry is not simply ours, but it is the voice of God's Spirit within us.

Paul uses an Aramaic word for "father" which is *Abba*. Then he used the Greek Word for "father" for those who did not know the meaning of the Aramaic term. However, the Jews did not address God as *Abba*, but *Ab*. That is probably because *Abba* is a very personal word that could be translated "Daddy" or "Papa." It's a personal term of trust, dependence, intimacy, tenderness, and love. Jesus Himself addressed His Father with the affectionate term of *Abba* (Mk. 14:36), and so can we, now that we are adopted into His family. There is strong presumption, too, that when Jesus taught His disciples to begin their prayers with "Father, Hallowed by thy name" (Lk. 11:2, RV), the word He used for "Father" was *Abba*.

Who can address your earthly father with the term "daddy"? No one but his children. Even so, unless we are saved & enabled by the Spirit to view God with filial reverence and tenderness, it would be presumption and arrogance to address God as "Abba, Father." Have you noticed that non-evangelical "ministers" tend to address God with some impersonal designation like "the Great Creator," or "the First Cause of All Being"? What does that say about them in light of this verse?

How do you relate to God? Do you relate to God in a spirit of fear? Do you get uncomfortable when a preacher preaches about the judgment of God? Or do you have a sense of a close, loving relationship to God as Father? Do you know what it is to cry out to God, recognizing Him as a loving Heaven Father? When you're hurt, or have a need, do you run to your Heavenly Father in prayer, and cry out to Him as "Father"? If so, that's a good indication that you are a child of God.

Yet another good evidence of being a true child of God of God is this: You are a child of God:

D. If The Spirit Bears Witness with Your spirit that You Are His Child - In v.15 the Spirit makes us conscious of God being our Father. Here in v.16 the other side is given in that the Spirit actively bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. We are not to construe this witness of the Spirit as consisting in a direct revelation to the effect, "You are a child of God." How, then, does the Spirit bear witness that we are children of God? First, he bears witness by His very presence and work continually within us. Furthermore, He gives an inward impression of an assurance of the great love the Father has bestowed upon us (cf. 1 Jn. 3:1). You are not to look for it in anything ecstatic or arbitrary. Instead, it will be like a "still small voice,"—no whirlwind, nor fire, nor earthquake—taking the voice and tones of your own heart and your own consciousness.

The certain fact of our reception as sons of God must be based objectively on the written Word of God, and then, subjectively, on the fact of the Holy Spirit's joint witness with our spirit. For example, when you read that God Himself has nothing against you any more because Jesus

Christ has satisfied every demand of justice and righteousness of God, does a second voice within your heart bear witness that this is blessedly true for you?

Finally, at the end of my text, Paul adds yet another indication that a person is a child of God, and that is:

E. If You Suffer for Christ – Paul says in the last of v.17 that we are children & heirs of God “if indeed we suffer with Him...” The word “if” (*eiper*) could be translated “since” or “if we really suffer with Him.”<sup>2</sup> It is assumed that those who are true Christians will suffer. Or we can say it another way: Suffering with Christ is one evidence that we are a Christian. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.” The hostile, Christ-rejecting world doesn’t like believers because they are a contrast to their sinfulness. Suffering is a proof that we have been joined to Him who, when He was on earth, was “despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (Isa. 53:3). We must realize that one negative aspect of being a true child of God is that living for Christ will often require suffering on our part. In fact, some 200 million Christians are being persecuted worldwide, according to several estimates that I have read. Right here in America Christians are losing jobs because of their faith. Others are being slandered in the news media because of their faith. When you identify with Jesus by baptism, by active church membership, and by being a witness for Him, don’t be surprised if you suffer to some degree. But take comfort. This is one of the best indications that you are a true child of God. You may suffer now, but you are destined for glory with Christ in heaven, as we shall see in a few moments.

If you are already suffering for Christ, that is a good indication that you are a child of God. If you are not suffering ridicule or rejection for your identification with Christ, are you at least *willing* to suffer for Christ? After, He suffered so much for you. If so, that’s a good indication that you are a Christian.

I have given you 5 ways you can know that you are a child of God. What have you concluded? Do you know God as your Father in your heart? Do you love to hear about your Father? Or is He some impersonal deity to you? Is the Spirit indwelling you, leading you, and sanctifying you? Do you love Jesus enough that you are willing to identify with Him and suffer for Him? If so, then enjoy the assurance of salvation that this text of Scripture gives. On the other hand, if you realize that you are not a child of God, you can become one today. Jesus died on the cross for your sins. Now if you put your trust in Him, He will forgive you, cause you to be born again, and you will receive the Holy Spirit. God will become your Heavenly Father. You will begin to know Him in a personal way. Then, you will know that you are a child of God on your way to heaven.

Now once you know for sure that you are a child of God, the second main thing I want you to do is this:

## II. UNDERSTAND WHAT SONSHIP MEANS

It is not enough for you to know that you are a son or child of God. You also need to know what that means, in order to appropriate the privileges and blessings of being a child of God. Furthermore, if you are not yet a Christian, I want you to understand what you will gain by becoming a child of God.

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<sup>2</sup> H. E. Dana & Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955);

Now if you are the son of a homeless hobo, that does not carry any privileges for you. But if you are a son or daughter of a millionaire, that grants you a number of privileges. You see, the son of a hobo lives far differently from the son of a millionaire. How much more should we be blessed by being children of God? So let's see what our sonship means. First of all:

A. We Now Have a Loving Heavenly Fatherly - If you are a Son, then you have a Father. Who is your Father? Paul indicates in v.15 that the true children of God recognize God as their Father.

The story is told of Karen, who had an alcoholic and abusive father. He abandoned his family when she was two years old. Every Father's Day her mother made her write a card to the father she never knew—but her father never responded.

Although Karen's father never accepted her, she found a different way to fill the void. She learned at church that God could be her father. Whenever she went out to play on her roller skates, she yelled, "Hey, God! Look at me!" She felt a special awareness of His presence, as if God were smiling from heaven. Rather than focusing her attention on the man who abandoned her, she directed her affection toward God, who is a father to the fatherless (Ps. 68:5). Although she never received approval from her earthly father, Karen found approval & security through her Heavenly Father.<sup>3</sup> Oh, how wonderful it is to have God as our Father!

Now let's see further what kind of Father God is.

1. He is a Love Father, not a Slave Driver – Again, Paul said in v.15, "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" We are not delivered from the bondage of sin, only to have another evil master. Though in a sense we are slaves of God in terms of obedience, it is different in that it is not a bondage of fear. After all, when Jesus Christ died, the sword of judgment fell upon Him, and not even God Himself can draw it forth to strike a man who has put his trust in the Savior. The Christian is never to tremble with fear of judgment. Rather, we view God as a loving Father, whom we serve & obey out of gratitude. Something is wrong with your relationship with God if you serve Him with a fearful, grudging spirit. The crisis of what is called the conversion of John Wesley came when, in his own words, he "exchanged the faith of a servant for the faith of a son."

2. The Father Provides for You - He is my Father, He will supply all my needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:19). Jesus said in Mt. 6:31-33, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' ... For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Life is not lived in joy if you are always worrying about food and clothes and the necessities of life. But with such a loving, Heavenly Father, we can rest in His provision, as long as we do our part.

3. The Father Leads Us by the Spirit - A good father will seek to lead and guide his children in the right way. Even so, we have already seen in v.14 that God leads us by His Spirit. He has not only given us a roadmap for life's journey in the Bible, but He has also given us a personal Guide when He gave us His Spirit.

4. He Does Discipline However – If you do not follow the directions & guidance of your Heavenly Father, He knows that it is His job to discipline His children. God wants you to enjoy the Christian life, but when you pursue a path of sin, He will work to get you back on the right path, for sin robs you of joy and so many other blessings.

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<sup>3</sup> Kent Crockett, *I Once Was Blind, But Now I Squint* (AMG Publishers, 2004) in *Pulpit Helps*, September 05, Page 32.

So if you are a child of God, you have the privilege of having fatherly care and guidance. And being a child of God means something else:

B. We Now Have An Eternal Inheritance – Paul says in v.17, “and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ....” (See also Galatians 4:7). In the human relationship today, not all children are heirs. But in God’s economy, there is no possible chance for a child of God to be disinherited. Just as salvation is by grace, so is the inheritance by grace. *Every* child of God will inherit heaven. 1 Peter 1:4 says that we have “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.” We will also inherit the coming Kingdom. Jesus said in Mt. 25:34, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Furthermore, God Himself is the inheritance of His children. Ps. 73:25-26 says, “Whom have I in heaven but You? ... God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” Don’t think that you will spend eternity with nothing. We are heirs of God.

Notice also that we are joint-heirs of Christ. In law there is a difference between an heir and a joint-heir. Most of the time, an estate is divided among the heirs. For example, suppose that after a father & mother die, they leave a large farm to four children. When the estate is divided evenly, each heir receives twenty-five percent of the whole. But if they leave the farm to four children as joint-heirs, then each child is a co-owner of the whole farm. Their parents jointly owned the farm, now the children jointly own the farm.

So this means that the children of God enter in jointly with Christ into the possession of the inheritance which was bestowed upon *Him*! Heb. 1:2 says, “in these last days [God has] spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things.” Christ is heir of all things. And if we are joint-heirs with Christ, that means that everything God the Father has given to Him has been given to us also! After all, when a husband & wife marry, they become co-owners of the property. In fact, when Cheryl & I married, I vowed that I would share with her all my worldly goods. My house is her house. My car is her car. My desert is her desert! Even so, the Bride of Christ, His Church, will jointly own all that Christ has. Wow! When she married me she got a little. But when she put her faith in Christ & became *His* bride, she will get everything!

Yet we have the idea that some will inherit more than others. We *will* have different levels of reward, but that is mainly in terms of responsibility, not property. It is joint ownership of the whole of heaven, not inheriting a part, as if heaven will be divided among all of the redeemed, some getting more real estate than others. Don’t worry that you are only going to get a little cramped house in heaven, while someone else gets a 25-room mansion. John 14:2 actually says, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places,” not “mansions.” You will not only own your dwelling place, but everybody else’s dwelling place! The streets of gold will be yours. The walls of jasper will be yours. The gates of pearl will be yours! It all belongs to you as a joint-heir of Jesus Christ.

Our inheritance is not only the kingdom of heaven, but also to share in the glory which was Christ’s in the reward of His exaltation. This is expressly stated by Jesus in John 17:22, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them....” This is also clearly suggested in the last of v.17 of our text, “that we may also be glorified together.” Jesus said in Rev. 3:21, “To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.” We will share in the glory of reigning with Christ.

Conclusion: What a privilege it is to be a child of God! We have a loving, Heavenly Father, and all the blessings that come from having such a Father. We have an amazing inheritance awaiting us. What a future we have in Christ. I wouldn't miss being a child of God for anything in this world.

My question for you is this: Are you sure that you are a child of God, and that you partake of the blessings of being a child of God? If not, I invite you to trust Christ as Savior, or seek assurance of salvation. If you are sure you are a child of God, are you living like it? Are you walking worthy of so great a salvation? Are you appropriating the privileges of being a child of God? If not, I invite you to make a recommitment of your life to the Lord today.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 3, "God's Heirs" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Stephen Felker, [\*Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible\*](#) (Col. Hgts, VA: Published by Author), 2008; John MacArthur, Jr., *Security in the Spirit: Study Notes on Romans 8* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1985); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 12 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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