

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Romans 8: 15

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank God, it's time to read the Bible again. Let's continue to read Romans Chapter 8. We will read verse 15 today.

Speaking of the glorification of the saints, Paul emphasizes the growth of the saints' life. From the very beginning, when we received grace and salvation and became children of God, although within us there is already the life of God and in the future we also have the position to inherit God's inheritance, yet this life must grow and mature in order to legally inherit the inheritance. And this process of life's growth is the very process of our sanctification. In the process of sanctification, we must all live under the operation of the law of the Spirit of life, enabling us to be freed from the law of sin and death.

Paul also specifically tells us about three realms of sanctification: that the Spirit of God can make His home in us; that having the Spirit of Christ, we become those who belong to Christ; and that through the indwelling of the Spirit of the One who raised Christ from the dead, life can be given to our mortal bodies. And the degree to which the saints can reach the realm of sanctification determines the measure of glory they will have in their glorification. Therefore, when Paul speaks of glorification, he begins from being able to be led by the Spirit of God. Such saints are no longer children but have grown into sons of God, possessing a certain measure of life.

Version 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.'"

"You" refers to those saints who can be led by the Spirit of God and who have grown into the sons of God. In this verse there are two spirits: the spirit of a slave and the

spirit of a son. Actually, rendering the word translated as “heart” in the original is misleading because the original word is *pneuma*, so “spirit” is the more accurate translation. The word translated “son” in the original is not *huios* but *huiiothesia*; this Greek word is composed of two parts: *huios*, meaning “son,” and *tithemi*, meaning “to place” or “to appoint.” The Greek ending *-sia* indicates that it denotes a quality or state; in this verse it is translated as “son,” but the same word is rendered “sonship” in 8:23 and again in 9:4. Therefore, translating it as “sonship” is more accurate.

In English it is translated as “adoption as a son,” which expresses the idea of a child who has grown up, gone through the rite of passage into adulthood, and can now truly become a son. He has the legal qualification to inherit the inheritance, which means he has obtained the sonship. So it is the process of growing from a child into a son. He already had a life relationship with the father, but now, as his life has grown, he must go through a legal procedure that acknowledges he has reached the legally recognized maturity. He then becomes the father’s son in the full sense, able to inherit the father’s inheritance. He may enjoy the corresponding rights, but he must also bear the responsibilities that come with them.

Concerning the term adoption as a son or becoming an adopted son, I need to make some clarification. In modern times, because many families are broken and children are left homeless, some kindhearted people adopt these children. They must also go through certain legal procedures in order to become the child’s lawful guardian; that child then becomes their adopted son, which in Chinese is translated as 養子.

This concept of an adopted son is completely different from what Paul means by adoption as a son. An adopted son has no life relationship with the father who adopts him, but we do have a life relationship with God the Father. Our rebirth is having received the life of God, and it is by this that we have become God’s children. Some preachers, not understanding this distinction, often claim in their sermons that we are God’s adopted sons, but this is actually incorrect. From the discussion above, the translation of this verse should be: “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”

If we look at this verse alone, it is not very easy to understand why Paul speaks about the spirit of bondage and the Spirit of sonship. As we mentioned before, both Galatians and Romans were written while Paul was in the city of Corinth. Galatians was written when Paul came to Corinth before the end of his second missionary journey, where he stayed for eighteen months, and it was also the first epistle Paul wrote. Romans was written when Paul came again to Corinth near the end of his third missionary journey, a span of nearly five years apart. The content of these two books is similar: Galatians emphasizes the gospel of grace, and it is relatively short with only six chapters, because many details had not yet been fully developed by Paul; Romans, however, is complete, as Paul presents the full gospel of God. Therefore, these two books should be read together: Galatians can be viewed as the outline, and Romans as the development of Galatians. Thus, when reading Romans and looking back at Galatians, we can understand why Paul wrote in such a way.

In fact, Romans 8:15 is the conclusion of Galatians 4:1–7, and its purpose is to introduce the following discourse concerning heirs. So let us, through the passage of Galatians 4:1–7, try to enter into Paul's line of thought and see why he wrote Romans 8:15.

We have received grace and salvation, obtained the life of God, and become children of God, so that in the future we may inherit God's inheritance. However, when we are still children, we are no different from slaves, having to be under the instruction of stewards and tutors. Therefore, we are also under the bondage of the law. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to accomplish redemption with the purpose that we might receive the sonship.

When Paul wrote Galatians, he did not elaborate much on the experience of life's growth or on the process of sanctification for the saints; perhaps Paul himself was still in that very process and thus was not yet able to describe the details of sanctification. But regarding the final outcome, Paul was already very certain and very clear: we are to become heirs of God and to inherit God's inheritance. A few years later, when Paul wrote Romans, he added Romans chapters 5 through 8,

which unfold this process of sanctification. Once we have passed through the process of sanctification and have a certain measure of life, we grow into sons.

Let us return to Galatians 4:6–7: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” Once we have grown into sons, God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, which corresponds exactly to what Romans 8:15 says. What we receive is not the spirit of a slave, still under the bondage of the law like a child; what we receive is the Spirit of sonship.

Through Galatians, we understand that the Spirit of sonship comes from the Spirit of God’s Son, that is, the Spirit of Christ. In the stage of sanctification, as we have said, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within our spirit, bringing with Him all the fullness of the Triune God; this naturally includes the Spirit of Christ. When the Spirit of Christ comes, He works to produce the likeness of Christ in us. At this point, we possess the Spirit of sonship, meaning we have the legal qualification to inherit God’s inheritance.

To receive the Spirit of sonship—the word “receive” in Greek is *lambano*, translated into English as “lay hold of”; it does not merely mean to accept passively, but indicates that we obtain it by paying a cost. In other words, as the Spirit of Christ operates in us and we cooperate with Him, we grow into the likeness of God’s Son, and thus we are able to cry out, “Abba! Father!” “Abba” is Aramaic, and using it to address the Father is very similar to the Chinese 阿爸. “Father” is Greek, *pater*, and combining these two linguistic forms gives a particularly intimate sense. God the Father is the Father of Jewish saints as well as of Gentile saints. We can so intimately call God “Abba! Father!” because the Spirit of sonship dwells in us; this Spirit enters our heart, so that, as Galatians 4:6 says, we can call out in full agreement of heart and mouth, “Abba! Father!”

Dear brothers and sisters, we must have a correct understanding of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings with Him all the fullness of the Triune God—everything is included, and all that we need is contained in this Spirit—and this

Spirit dwells within us. Many times, we are like beggars hiding great treasures inside us. We must learn to draw upon them so that we can actually use and experience these riches; only then can all the various riches of the Triune God become a practical reality in our lives.

Paul often places many adjectives before the word “Spirit” to help us draw upon and experience the riches that pertain to the Holy Spirit. In his discussion of glorification, Paul places particular emphasis on the Spirit of sonship. Receiving the sonship is God’s eternal will that was determined before all ages. As Ephesians 1:4–5 says, “just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.” God, before the creation of the world, predestined that we would receive the sonship.

When we receive grace and salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within us, granting us rebirth; and the Spirit of sonship is already included within the Holy Spirit. It is not until one day, as our life grows, that the Spirit of God can make His home in us and the Spirit of Christ can operate, that the Spirit of sonship is manifested. It can then begin to work within us, shaping us into the likeness of God’s Son. This process is gradual, living, and is led by the Spirit of sonship.

The various riches of Christ are imparted into our soul, where the mind discerns, the emotions delight, and finally the will makes a decision that brings forth action in the body. This is an operation from the inside out, ultimately manifesting in our life the testimony of God’s Son. On one hand, we enjoy all the riches in the house of God; on the other hand, we fulfill the duties of a son in God’s house. At this point, we can truly cry out from our heart, “Abba! Father!” Our Father hears this with great joy and responds, “Behold! My son!”

Dear brothers and sisters, what we are experiencing today is only a foretaste. The full accomplishment of our sonship will not be realized until Christ returns and our bodies are redeemed. Yet even in today’s foretaste, we can intimately cry out, “Abba! Father!” On that day, God’s glory will be fully manifested in us. When we

call out, “Abba! Father!” it will not only be us but thousands upon thousands of sons glorifying the Father together, all crying out, “Abba! Father!”—what an overwhelming and awe-inspiring scene that will be. May we, in our church life today, experience all the riches of the Father’s household, anticipating that future day when we will share in the glory together and give all glory to God the Father.

Let us pray together: Dear Lord Jesus, we never imagined that a simple act of believing would open up such a marvelous journey of life. From rebirth, while still children, under the guidance and distribution of the Holy Spirit, our life grows; we are led by the Spirit of God, receive the sonship, and are able to manifest the character of Christ, so that we can truly call God, “Abba! Father!” and one day be brought into such a glorious scene that far exceeds all we could ask or imagine. Lord, thank You for allowing us to see such a glorious future. Today, encourage each of us to forget what is behind and press toward the goal, striving for the upward reward for which You have called us. Bless every moment of my days with the reality of life’s growth, that I may not waste time or space, but use my life to testify that Christ is my Lord. Continue to lead us forward. We pray in the holy name of our Lord Jesus Christ.