

Romans 8:14-17 ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons¹ of God. 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!" ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

The Spirit of Adoption

This past Friday evening I performed for Happy Hour over at King Nursing Home in Bolton. There's a man over there that I routinely get into a conversation with and Friday he was very much in the mood to talk. He's much younger than most of the residents and very smart, and he needs to have a real conversation whenever he can have it. As a child he was adopted by an elderly Jewish couple. So, he's used to being with the elderly, but most of the people there have limitations, so to speak, and it's lonely for him.

So anyway, he asked me what branch or division I was with. I guess he was trying to figure out if I was a Branch Davidians. (Pun. Ha, ha.) I answered, "Presbyterian." He knew the name but nothing about the denomination. Then knowing my mountain roots, he jokingly asked what my church was like, the worship service particularly, saying, "Are you one of those Evangelical, hand waving, pull out the snakes places." I laughed and answered, "We're traditioned." He goes, "Oh, traditional." I said, "Not traditional, traditioned." Then he asked what I meant. I tried to get going on how we are shaped by our tradition, the Reformed Tradition if that means anything. I wanted to tell him that our worship service reflects the way our founders believed God should be approached. We begin with praise and adoration, we hear the Gospel that in, through, and as Jesus Christ God has saved his Creation and in so doing has made us right and able to be in his presence, a forgiveness and reconciliation that God has made real by the gift of the Holy Spirit who is with us and in us. Then we listen to God as the Holy Spirit opens our ears, minds, and lives to hear the Word, Jesus Christ, through hearing Scripture read and pondering them with the sermon. Then we pray. Then we give. Then we go into the world to proclaim and to live the Gospel.

I wanted to say that but didn't. I rather went the path of trying to explain that when churches leave behind their traditioned liturgy, or way of worshipping, they soon forget who they are in Christ and Biblical faith gets supplanted by something else, usually that something else in our individualism driven culture is "my faith", what "I" believe. We start talking and singing about "my" Jesus rather than that I/we belong to Jesus. Unfortunately, in the Christian faith today there are many ways to talk about Jesus and "my" faith and yet in the end "my" faith winds up straying from biblical faith. "My" faith is still "my" faith even if the name of Jesus is tied to it. The Masonic faith is still the Masonic faith no matter how biblical it appears. Biblical faith is based in the faith and faithfulness of Jesus Christ and it is his faith and faithfulness by which we are saved and it is his faith and faithfulness that we are brought into by the gift of the Holy Spirit who makes salvation real to us.

Well, I didn't quite say it that way to my friend. Rather, I asked him, "What would happen in the Jewish faith if every Friday night in Synagogue they ceased to read the Exodus?" He caught on then to what I was saying. He told me how his parents first took him to an Orthodox synagogue that was very traditional, everything was in Hebrew. You know you're a Jew when you are part of that and understand what is being said. Then they moved and started going to a Conservative synagogue where the Sabbath liturgy was mostly in English and wasn't the same for him and he stopped going. Then he went on to say how Reformed Jews now really have ceased to be Jewish because nearly anything goes in their services while the memory of the Exodus is not shaping them. Rather, something extra-biblical is.

Well anyway, I brought all this up for reasons I'm not sure about and I hope I can tie it back in later. But moving on, I thought it was interesting that my friend reached for a warped charismatic referent to inquire about what things were like in this church. It was a bit of a Freudian slip, because in the Jewish faith even though they know about the Holy Spirit they don't talk about him and rather downplay anything that might be called spiritual. In fact, the Rabbinical teaching is that you listen to the voice of reason rather than the "Qol Bat", the "voice of the daughter", which is a rather derogatory way in their culture to talk about a living relationship with God. To the early Rabbis, what a daughter had to say was to be disregarded. Oddly, in the early church, being filled by the Spirit and led by the Spirit was at the heart of faith and faithfulness. It was the Kingdom of God come.

The Gospel Jesus preached was/is "the Kingdom of God is at hand. Do a 180° in the way you're doing your life and be faithful." Everything Jesus said and did was, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God – the reign of God – breaking forth in this world. It was things being here on earth as they are in heaven. This breaking in of the kingdom, the reign, of God has continued in the church by the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Rabbi's said "don't listen to the

Spirit because the mind can figure out what God wants". In the early church, it was listen to, walk according to the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. For, in the Spirit we the church are participating in the Kingdom, the reign of God breaking into this world just as it was when Jesus ministered in Israel. Jesus didn't say, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" for nothing. He meant it because the Father was going to and did send the Holy Spirit, the Counsellor, the Comforter, the Advocate, to us that we might carry out the mission of the Son, whose body we are, the mission of doing the works of the reign of God.

Back to this "my faith" stuff I was talking about a few minutes ago, in a "Traditional" church "my faith" says "I believe in God." Yet, the God I claim to believe in I don't know because "I" keep him hidden behind "my" traditions. In the Evangelical church, "my faith" says I believe in Jesus as "my" saviour. Yet, in our individualistic concern about "my" salvation we narrow the scope of salvation down to individuals rather than being a whole creation saving event and shrink the Gospel from being about the Kingdom of God being at hand and Jesus having saved God's whole creation to simply being about me and my soul. In the Charismatic churches who talk a lot about the Holy Spirit, "my faith" tends to be more about "my feeling" than anything else. In the Presbyterian church we tend to be somewhere between Traditional and Evangelical and we get real uncomfortable with anything that appears too Charismatic and this is because we like most of Western big steeple Christianity are afraid of relinquishing control of "my faith" to the Holy Spirit and the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Yet, our fears aside, the work of the Holy Spirit is critical to having Biblical faith. Just going through the Scripture passages we heard the morning. The prophet Joel wrote a prophesy sometime between 800 and 400 BC which Peter said was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh." Does this mean everybody now has been baptized in the Holy Spirit? It could. God could do that if he so chooses. Indeed, receiving the Holy Spirit isn't simply something that automatically and usually unnoticeably happens after "I" decide to invite Jesus into "my" heart. Oddly, you will not find anywhere in the Bible even the idea of having to invite Jesus into your heart to be saved. What we do find is that it is the Holy Spirit who makes us able to proclaim the Gospel that in, through, and as Jesus Christ God has saved his creation and us with it from sin and death and evil by Jesus death on the cross and with his resurrection God is bringing in his Kingdom and making all things new and the proof of this, the assurance of this, is the free gift of the Holy Spirit to his people.

The proclaiming of the Gospel cannot be separated by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes us able to proclaim the Gospel, makes us able to speak for God which is what it is to prophesy, and the Holy Spirit enables people to hear the Gospel, and to hear God and come to faith. The very speaking of the Gospel is the Holy Spirit acting on humans to implant the seeds of the Kingdom of God and awaken people to become disciples of Jesus Christ. There on the Day of Pentecost people heard the Gospel even in their own native tongue. In 3,000 of them faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour was the result. The rest just scoffed at it saying the Apostles were drunk.

In the Gospel of John Jesus says that the Father is in him and he is in the Father and this union of God the Father and God the Son is in the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is the relationship of the Father and the Son as the third Person of the Trinity. But that's a topic for another day. God's free gift of the Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus so that we share in the Son's relationship to the Father. It is not quite biblically accurate to carry on about "my" personal relationship to God or to tell people they need to have your own personal relationship to God without first quantifying that that relationship is in Jesus Christ through union with him in the Holy Spirit. To say this a little differently, we know and experience the steadfast love and faithfulness of the Father as Jesus did. We know and experience Jesus' own desire to be obedient to the Father.

Paul says that the Holy Spirit is not a spirit of slavery, but the Spirit of adoption. The Spirit makes us to know that we are God's children. He makes us able to know the Father as Jesus knows him so that we cry out, "Abba! Father!" This is the teaching work of the Holy Spirit that Jesus talked about in John's Gospel. Jesus said the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. The Hebrew understanding of Truth isn't factual correctness. It's whether someone can be trusted and responded to in faithfulness. The Holy Spirit makes us able to have faith in and be faithful to the Father because he unites us to Jesus and teaches us, makes us to know personally the love of the Father for the Son in the Holy Spirit. Amen.