**Heirs of God**

**Romans 8:14-18**

September 4, 2016

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

*14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons 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. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

Throughout Romans 8, God makes repeated promises and statements to assure the believer that we are completely safe in Christ Jesus. God’s sovereign love for us in Christ guarantees that He will never cease His sanctifying work in us until we are fully made righteous on that future day when we stand before Him. We need never fear that God is going to withdraw His love from any person who is in Christ Jesus. We cannot overstate the practical importance of the believer’s assurance of salvation to bring about fruitful worship of the Lord. The apostle John wrote an entire letter devoted to this one theme. I believe this entire chapter of Romans 8 is devoted to this one theme. But the Apostle John, at the end of his first letter, writes this:

1 John 5:13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.

We have been asking the question: “Why is it so very important that we are assured of our salvation? As long as we have salvation, isn’t that the only thing that really matters?” I would say it’s the most important thing that matters, but it’s not the only thing that matters. This issue of assurance is very important to the Christian life as well.

This question is reasonable since it is more important to objectively possess eternal life than it is to subjectively *feel* like one possesses eternal life. And we acknowledge thata person may genuinely possess eternal life and not be assured. And on the other hand, a person may *feel* very sure of their salvation and yet not possess eternal life. Such a one has false confidence in a false faith.

God communicates His Gospel to us so that those who do have eternal life through faith in Jesus would *know* that they have eternal life, and know it with an absolute certainty. When John writes in 1 John 5:13, he doesn’t say, “I write these things to you so that you might be fairly confident that you have eternal life.” He doesn’t write, “I write these things to you so that you might give yourselves the benefit of the doubt regarding eternal life.” No. He says, “I write these things to you, this entire letter is devoted to this issue of assurance, that you might know with certainty that you have eternal life.”

Why is this knowing, this certainty, this assurance of our salvation, so important to our worship of God and our growth in godliness? We’ve been learning a principle through Romans 8 and that principle is stated: God’s assurances give us confidence, strength and boldness to live obediently and fruitfully for His glory. It’s our assurance that actually fuels our ability to worship God rightly. You’d say, “How so? How does that work?” Let me illustrate.

When my second son Daniel was in high school we took a trip together to West Virginia with some other dads and their sons from the church. One of the adventure activities of that trip was repelling down the face of a sheer rock cliff. Well, I have to tell you that I do not share my son, Daniel’s natural love of risk and of heights. When I looked down this steep cliff to the ground below, I felt very, very shaky. Before we began repelling, however, the guides asked us all to sit down at the top of this precipice. And for about half of an hour they simply talked to us. They talked to us about their experiences. They talked to us about their training. They talked to us about every piece of equipment that we would be using. They talked about the harness, the carabiners, the two separate ropes. They explained how much weight each piece would hold, how they have double safety measures for each descent, how each piece worked specifically, and how they have done this hundreds of times. Why did they take a half hour to discuss all of this with us? Why not simply strap on the equipment and get going on the repel trip? There’s one reason. They wanted us to be assured that we were safe going down over that overhang. They knew that we needed faith in them and in the equipment if we were going to let our bodies relax, lean out away from that rock face, and enjoy an effective, pleasant, repelling trip down that cliff.

So when it came my turn, what did I do? I was still a bit afraid, but I rehearsed all the assurances that they had made to me and then I launched my body out and the rope caught me. And it was actually very pleasant. And as I repelled down that rock cliff, I got finally to the bottom and breathed a sigh of relief. But then I scrambled up to the top to do it again. The assurances made all the difference. If I was not sure of the equipment or sure of the guides, I would have never begun the trip. And if I had begun it, I would have done it so fearfully that I would have scraped myself along the edge because I would have wanted to hold on to the rock face rather than kick away from it.

Living the Christian life is far more scary than repelling down a cliff wall. It involves suffering. It involves courage. It involves commitment. Living the Christian life will cause us to ask the question, “Am I safe in God’s care? Can I trust that God has me in His hands?” It’s the question that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had to ask as they decided to stand up and not bow down to the idol that the king had made. (Daniel 3) It’s a question that each one of us is going to have to ask variously throughout every week of our lives. Do I trust God? Am I secure? You see, if we do not have assurances from God, our fears will paralyze us in our fight against sin and in our labor for the Lord.

Imagine if David did not have assurance from God that the Lord would fight for him against Goliath (1 Samuel 17). God’s assurances give us confidence, strength and boldness to live obediently and fruitfully for His glory. It is right for every Christian then to make it their aim and to pursue assurance of their salvation.

Now, I understand that some presume upon God’s salvation and feel a confidence for which they have no biblical ground, no biblical warrant. However, someone’s abuse of a doctrine does not disprove it. It does not negate it. The doctrine of the assurance of a believer’s salvation is written in bold throughout the New Testament, and in no passage is it more clearly done so than in Romans 8. Romans 8 begins with this bold statement:

**Romans 8:1** There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

So Friend, if you are in Christ Jesus, I urge you to make it your aim to seek after and enjoy the assurance that God offers you. It’s really important! Romans 8:14-17 presents assurances to us in the metaphor or in the illustration of adoption. God makes much of His adoption of us as sons so that we would be assured that we have a God who will never withdraw His Fatherly love from us.

Now I know that many believers struggle with the doctrine of eternal security or its preferred name, “the perseverance of the saints.” But I would urge you to meditate upon this doctrine of God’s adoption because I think that if you stop and think long enough about God’s adoption, you will no longer struggle with this issue of the perseverance of the saints.The imagery God chooses to use to describe His relationship with us is that of a Father, a Daddy, as it were. The word “Abba” is used by small children to talk about their father, their daddy, to address him. Would a good daddy cast away and reject a son that he has adopted?   
This morning we take note of three securities resulting from God’s adoption of those who receive Jesus.

**Security #1: God’s adoption secures our familial communion with God.**

That word “familial” simply means “family.” We have communion or fellowship with God that is similar to the fellowship inside a family. In fact, it is not just similar, but it is the same. It is deep and it is strong.

*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!”*

Our communion with God is such that we address Him as “Father,” and we even cry in the midst of our distress. In the midst of our neediness we cry, “Abba! Daddy!”

I want you to notice this verse teaches us a change of relationship with God that is highlighted by our adoption. Our natural-born relationship with God is described here as one of a “spirit of slavery” that is characterized by fear of God’s judgment and of God’s condemnation for our sin. But this Holy Spirit that God has set in our hearts to dwell in us, has produced within us this warmth and this desire to lean into and to draw near to God and to cry out “Daddy! Father!” The Holy Spirit here is called the “spirit of adoption” in order to remind us of how central this experience is to the life of the believer.

The Holy Spirit is given a number of names in the New Testament. We’ve seen a number of them even here. He’s called “the spirit of Christ.” He’s called the “spirit of God.” But here He is called the “spirit of adoption.” Central to His work is this work of adopting us into God’s family.

Remember that God reveals Himself as a God who is infinitely holy and righteous and pure. He says that His law is holy and righteous and pure. No man, no sinful man, dare rush into God’s presence if we are unclean! And the Scripture is clear from this letter and on backwards and on forwards, that God indicts us as sinners who are unworthy to enter into His presence. He tells us we’re all like sheep. We’ve all gone astray and to our own ways, our own rebellion, our own sins. We have transgressed His holy law, and thus we are all under sin, under its condemnation, under its power.

When we read the Old Testament, we find a people who are afraid to draw near to God’s presence precisely because He is holy and we are not. They knew that no man could approach God and live. When we come to the New Testament, we find a strong encouragement for us to enter confidently, to enter boldly. It’s such a strong encouragement that today in the 21st Century, modern Christians almost shrug their shoulders and say, “What’s the big deal about drawing near to God?” Well, it’s a big deal! It’s important for us to consider His holiness so we’d understand what a big deal this is. What a gift and what a blessing!

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

What is it that changed between the Old Testament and the New Testament, where this encouragement to enter into God’s presence with boldness is given so strongly? Some say that between the Old and the New Testament God became less concerned about sin. They say that God became less concerned about practical holiness. They claim that God is no longer filled with wrath and righteous indignation in view of man’s sin and that He now simply gives everyone a “pass” regarding judgment. But Beloved, that is not what the New Testament teaches! In fact, the New Testament teaches us even in more stark terminology the righteous wrath of God against sin. In this letter itself, we began in Romans 1:18 reading:

Romans 1:18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God is just as holy, just as righteous, just as pure today as He was in the Old Testament times. God is perfect. He is eternal. He remains the same yesterday, today and forever. So, if God is still filled with wrath over our sin, on what basis can we approach Him with boldness and with confidence? Romans answers that question by pointing us to the cross of Jesus. He says, “There’s the basis.” It’s that God took on human flesh to represent us, and He died as a sacrifice for sin, taking our sin and bearing our sin in His own body, satisfying God’s wrath, so that when we stand before God, we stand before God faultless. We stand before God righteous because Jesus’ righteousness is imputed to us and our sins are taken from us and imputed to Him, and born and paid the punishment that they deserved. This is what it means to be justified. This is the first theme of this letter in terms of the blessing of God’s salvation. On the basis of Jesus’ work, God as the righteous judge, declares us sinners to be righteous.

Romans 5:1-2 Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,

We remember reading this and thinking about this together a number of weeks ago. We have access to God. We can enter into His presence as a result of God’s justifying work through Jesus. This change would be enough in itself to completely transform our relationship with God. If all that God did was justify us, we could enter boldly and confidently. But now the Apostle Paul moves from that truth of justification, the truth that God as Judge looks at us who are guilty of breaking His law, and declares us righteous on the basis of Jesus’ work, and he unfolds now the Gospel’s very center. He moves to a new picture. It’s not God as Judge, who simply declares us righteous because of Jesus’ work. But now, he gives us the picture that God is a loving, relational dad who adopts orphans into His own family.

This is a picture of God being as approachable to sinners as a father is to his adopted children. This picture is unheard of among God’s people until Jesus enters this world. The Son of God takes on human flesh and begins to speak first of God as His Father and relates to Him as such, because Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity. And He is the eternal Son of God. But then Jesus, as a result of His work for us, invites us, His disciples, to have the same relationship with God as He has with God. This is unthinkable to think about for the 1st Century Jew. To naturally think of God so relationally, so caringly, so tenderly, as to approach Him as a child would their dad.

It’s such a startling picture of God, that if God’s Word didn’t clearly say that the Spirit enables us to cry, “Abba! Father!” we would be tempted to think, “Well that’s a totally too casual review of a person’s relationship with their sovereign Creator. John writes about this as well.

1 John 3:1 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are…

God teaches us that it’s not only appropriate to relate to God as a child does to his or her dad, but He urges us understand everything in our Christian life in terms of our sonship. Our adoption is not just *a* metaphor for thinking about our relationship with God, but adoption is *the* metaphor for thinking about our relationship with God. We can’t think about the doctrine of sonship too much. When we talk with God, we must talk with Him in view of our adoption. That’s why we call God, “Our Father who is in heaven.”

J.I. Packer rightly notes (*Knowing God*, p. 182):

“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God.”

And so, I want to ask you Friend: Do you think about your adoption very often? I urge you to meditate on it. It has such practical implications to us. How perfect is our adoption into God’s family? Well our adoption into God’s family is so complete that God’s eternal Son, Jesus, teaches us that it is right for Him to call us brothers. Now that is amazing and astounding!

Hebrews 2:11-12 For he who sanctifies those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.

Isn’t that amazing?! Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers! Paul is going to get to this in verse 17 of Romans 8 when he says that we are “fellow heirs with Jesus Christ.” Why would we be a fellow heir? Why would we have the same inheritance from God the Father that Jesus has as His inheritance from God the Father? The answer is because we are brothers. Now, Jesus is our Lord. He’s our Savior. But He’s also our Brother. That’s the metaphor. That’s the idea that God wants to set before us in our understanding of our adoption, the blessing of our adoption. God desires for this truth of our adoption to be the controlling influence in the way that we relate to Him. Our worship of God, our service to God, our fellowship with each other, our daily living for God, and our communing with God should be controlled by the truth that we are now God’s children!

Think for a moment about little children’s relationship with their daddy. What characterizes this kind of relationship between a boy or girl and his or her daddy? Now I know that many were not raised with a loving earthly father. I realize there is a deep wound for many. It is a deep wound that can’t completely be understood by those who don’t share in that painful experience. Yet, regardless of the earthly father we had, I believe we all share a vision of what that relationship should be. And what that relationship should be, is what God is. There are four characteristics of that relationship between a father and a son that stand out to me.

Characteristic #1: Our Father rules in authority over us and we respect Him.

That’s what adoption teaches us. My dad was one of the most kind, gentle men I have ever known. But every day that I grew up in his house, I knew that he was in charge over me. He did so gently. He did so lovingly. He did so caringly. I was confident that he had my best good in mind. But he was the dad of the house. I knew he was right to use his authority to steer me in a direction toward life and to stop me through discipline when I was veering off the path of life and into a path of sin and death. So, I respected my dad’s authority in the way I related to him. I didn’t always agree with him in his decisions, but I knew that it was his call to make. I knew it would be wrong to lash out against him in anger. I knew it would be wrong to rebel against his wishes. I knew it would be wrong to speak rudely to him. I did not fear him in the way a slave would fear a cruel master, but I did fear him in the sense of deep respect for his authority and place in my life. That’s the relationship between a dad and a child.

Characteristic #2: Our Father provides and protects completely and so we trust in Him.

Again, I remember that when I was a child, I didn’t have to fear whether or not I would have food to eat or clothes to wear or a bed to sleep in. I just assumed that my dad would take care of that. And he did. My dad lost several jobs throughout my childhood. Oftentimes, when he experienced what some are experiencing here in Peoria, where he was told, “There’s no job left for you here.” And I know he must have been concerned about that and brought it before the Lord, but I was never concerned about that because I knew I had a dad who was “on it” and was going to provide for me. So, a characteristic of our relationship with God is that our Father provides and protects completely. Now of course our Father in heaven is absolute in His provision and resources, unlike human fathers. But nonetheless, the analogy is there to teach us that we can trust Him. We can sleep in peace with dad being present.

Characteristic #3: Our Father acts in goodness and we find our joy in Him.

My dad took joy in me as his son. Now, I sometimes acted in ways that gave him displeasure. I know that. I needed His discipline. But I knew that even as my dad disciplined me, it was a form of his goodness. It was a form of his love for me. It was not him pushing me away, it was him drawing me near.

Furthermore, my dad would invest time in enjoying all kinds of games with me. We’d play football in our front yard and basketball in the driveway and board games on the living room floor. His heart was so very kind to me. I took joy in him because of his goodness to me. And that’s the relationship between us and our heavenly Father. He is so good that when we acknowledge His goodness, we take joy in Him.

Characteristic #4: Our Father loves us securely and we love Him in return.

I didn’t love my dad first. He loved me first. My love for him was simply a response of his love for me. My dad stimulated my love for him by showing love to me. He didn’t receive love from me because he demanded it. He didn’t say, “Ritch, this is a command. You should love me as your dad, so love me.” That’s not how love works. My love was elicited because of an overwhelming love that I received from him. God arouses us to love Him, not with threats, but by loving us first. I never feared that I could do something that would cause my dad to stop loving me. I was secure in that. A true and good dad always and forever loves his children. This is the reason why God will say at the end of Romans 8:

Romans 8:38-39 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Security #2: God’s adoption secures our future blessing from 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.*

Our adoption causes us to look forward in faith to a future day of joy. For the Christian, the best days are not right now, but they’re ahead of us. They are ahead of us when we receive the fullness of the inheritance as adopted sons. Our adoption makes a joyful future a guaranteed certainty since God promises an inheritance to His Son. What is this inheritance that God promises to us?

Our Father in heaven is wealthy beyond our wildest imagination and He offers us the full estate. What is His “estate”? We think of some of them. We think of, well, we have a home in heaven. He tells us that we’re also going to enjoy this amazing wedding feast with Him. It’s a time of celebration!He tells us that we’re going to rule with Christ in a kingdom. That’s going to be an amazing aspect of our inheritance! But, all these are lesser treasures in God’s estate. What is the great treasure in God’s estate? Note the wording carefully. It says we are “heirs of God.” We are not just heirs of God’s estate, but we are heirs of God Himself. The greatest portion of our inheritance is that God gives us His very Self. He is the supreme treasure!

Psalm 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

God doesn’t just give us good gifts. He gives us His very Self! Our future experience of seeing God in all of His wonder and splendor and holiness can’t be adequately described. When we experience God purely with the veil tossed aside, we will find that nothing else matters compared to that blessing. We can’t begin to put to words the joy and the meaning and the profound significance and wonder of that moment. That’s what it means to be an heir of God, and that’s true of every child, every one! That’s a promise! But notice also that Paul says that we are “fellow heirs with Christ.” That means that we will receive the exact same inheritance that Jesus receives from His Father! That is astounding!

We ask the question: Is all of our inheritance yet future? And the answer is, No. We receive some of that inheritance now. The Holy Spirit throughout Scripture is described as God’s down payment on the inheritance, His security, His guarantee.

Ephesians 1:14 He is the down payment of our inheritance, for the redemption of the possession, to the praise of His glory.

What does that mean? What does it mean for the Scripture to describe the Holy Spirit as the down payment? Well, if you put a down payment on a car, you’re paying the bank or a loan company a sum that says, “this represents some right now, but it also represents a promise that I’m going to continue to make payments all the way until that transaction is complete.”

What God does is, He says, “I’m giving you an inheritance. I’m going to give you my Holy Spirit now. He’s the third Person of the triune God. I’m going to give Him now so that you can enjoy getting to know God and enjoy God and the life of God and the peace of God right now. But it’s a down payment. It’s just a little bit of what is to come. But that little bit guarantees that what is to come is certain. I don’t give a down payment and then negate on the deal. I guarantee you, on the basis of the Holy Spirit’s presence in your life, that this inheritance is yet to come.”

Friends, beware of anyone who teaches you that your best life is now. It is not now. We await our best life when Jesus returns and when we receive the full measure of our inheritance. I believe so many Christian problems exist because we, whether consciously or unconsciously, believe that our best life should be now. But, it’s not. That’s never the promise of Scripture. This world is broken. Our heart is broken by sin and by death and everything else that comes with sin. Do we have life now? Yes. Do we have joy now? Yes. Do we have peace now? Yes. But do we also have pain and misery and suffering and hardship? And we hurt and we moan and we groan and we wonder if we can stand up underneath it. Yes to all those things. That is the description of the Christian life that God presents to us. But He says, “Christian, this is just a little while. Look beyond.” Future glory awaits every adopted son of God. Our Father is rich beyond imagination. He is the author of life, joy, peace and righteousness. Every good gift comes from Him. All that He has is committed to us. And even more, He offers us His very self!

So as Christians, we do not place our hope in this world or in the things of this world. We know everything that is in this world is temporary. We consciously refuse to make it our goal to become rich in the things of this world. Our hearts and our minds are elsewhere. The worst experience with Christ is better than the best experience this world offers without Him.

We ask the question: Is it right to desire our joy, even our future joy so much? Isn’t that selfish? And the answer is, No. It is the healthiest thing in all the world to say, “I desire as much joy in God as I could possibly gain right now. And I long for the day when I will have complete joy in Him on that day of my inheritance.” It’s right for us, necessary for us, healthy for us. We live weakened lives when we lose sight of our joyful future as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.

We’re going to spend a majority of our time in our next season in Romans on this third security. But I just want to mention it.

**Security #3: God’s adoption secures our final glorification with Christ.**

Where are we headed? What’s the end game for all of this in the Christian life?

*17 . . .provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.*

Being glorified with Jesus means that this process of us becoming more and more like Jesus will come to completion. We will one day be like Jesus. We will be glorified with Him and will experience the glory that He experiences, being with the Father. Glorification is the end goal of our sanctification. It’s where we’re moving. We want to always keep our minds in glorification, and not just in the present sanctification. Because then, it gives us hope, even when we stumble. So remember the glorifying work of God that is yet future, but is as certain as though it’s already happened. Keep that in mind!

And then notice the qualification. “Provided we suffer with him.” Our present suffering is God’s path to lead us to glory. So Friends, let’s not despair when God sets us in the way of pain and hardship and trials and hurt. His purpose for our suffering is our glory! Here’s what the Apostle Paul says about that:

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

If we don’t have this future hope, this meditation upon this truth of God’s adoption and of our future inheritance, we will lose heart. We can’t even begin to imagine the eternal weight of glory that affliction is preparing us for. Praise God that God has connected us to Himself by way of adoption! And He invites every person in this world to receive His Son. And if anyone would receive His Son, to that person, He gives the right to be called children of God.

I want to ask you: Are you assured that you are God’s child? The answer to that question makes all the difference in your life. Either you would say, “No, I’m not assured because I’m not a child of God.” God’s call would be to run to God’s Son, Jesus, and embrace Him by faith and you will have the right to be adopted into God’s family. Or you might say, “No, I’m not assured and I’m not sure of my salvation.” I’d urge you to meditate and roll this passage through your heart so that God would bring you assurance that He’s offering you by His Holy Spirit.