

In Jesus we belong to the father

Romans 8:12-17

New International Version

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ **The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.** And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Psalm 34:11-20

New International Version

¹¹ Come, my children, listen to me;
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

¹² Whoever of you loves life
and desires to see many good days,

¹³ keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from telling lies.

¹⁴ Turn from evil and do good;
seek peace and pursue it.

¹⁵ The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous,
and his ears are attentive to their cry;

¹⁶ but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil,
to blot out their name from the earth.

¹⁷ The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them;
he delivers them from all their troubles.

¹⁸ The Lord is close to the broken hearted
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

¹⁹ The righteous person may have many troubles,
but the Lord delivers him from them all;

²⁰ he protects all his bones,
not one of them will be broken.

It is always with a bit of trembling that I come to the book of Romans – there are many worthy tones written on it and sermons/messages galore.

We carry on in the chapter where we left off and of course we have that therefore, to remind us of the linkage and train of thought. Last week we were reminded of what it is to be in Christ, to be a believer and know that in Christ there is no condemnation (there are hymns that use that line) - it is by grace, by the sacrifice of Jesus that we are saved, reunited with God, cleansed, but under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Paul wanted us to know more as our title reminds us 'In Jesus we belong to the Father.

What does it mean to belong – you can tell from pictures members of my family, you can tell who belong to which scout or girl guide from the neckers and badges. How do we belong here in this congregation? Sometimes I wonder if that Paul was writing not churches with groaning pain, people disagreeing, (I'm sure some went off, some grumbled, some smiled patiently – such is our human nature) all the usual but belonging to the Father as congregations of believers.

Do you know that in Christ you belong to God the Father – I have sung that hymn refrain

Now I belong to Jesus,
Jesus belongs to me,
Not for the years of time alone,
But for eternity.

Yet I am struggling to re-call hymns, songs about belonging to God, God the Father.

Our Baptist concept of congregation, lean on the idea of belonging.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

To not live as slaves – what did a slave mean in those days; *manus*, a metaphor for possession and hence control and subordination. For most of us we have little or no idea of what being a slave meant or means. Listed as part of the belonging of your master, bought and sold at their discretion, any child born became property (some exemptions). A slave has no rights they are at the whim of their owners (Jacob in Potiphar's home, we feel it was so unjust). What is the mind-set of a slave? No hope in this life, low expectations, just wanting to survive, trying to earn your owner's approval. We are not to have that mind set, as in Jesus we belong to the Father. Through the Holy Spirit Paul is drawing on the images of the day, that still mean something today, to help us reflect on what being a slave is and contrasts it with being in the Spirit and belonging to the father. Becoming a Christian does not make us slaves, the marks of the Holy Spirit does not make us slaves. I am reminded of Jesus mission as he expressed it in Nazareth (I know slaves and prisoners are different, but...)

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Modern slavery in our society has been highlighted in recent years and various campaigns/ organisations have been birthed. How do we as believers engage with this?

The implication is that we are not to live in fear – slaves feared for their present and their future. Fear is natural when danger is around. When crossing the Bristol channel on the M48 on the bike, it gets windy – there is a natural fear of being blown over, irrational that I would be blown off the bridge and into the drink. Overcame this by singing,

As believers who have accepted Christ as Lord and Saviour, we are not given a spirit of fear, but one that links us to the divine, gives hope for the present and the future, we belong.

Compare with fear of the Lord.

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

Adoption and what it means then and now – belonging to the Father.

There was no process for adoption in the ancient Jewish culture. If a man died, his brother automatically became the head of his household, so there was no need for a legal adoption process. The word adoption, during the time and context in which St. Paul spoke, referred to the Roman concept of adoption.

In ancient Rome, it had a great deal to do with having a male heir to inherit and carry on the family (hence the language about sonship).

An adopted child received a new identity. Any prior commitments, responsibilities and debts were erased. New rights and responsibilities were taken on. Also, in ancient Rome, the concept of inheritance was part of life, not something that began at death, not just the adoptee but the family become more secure. Being adopted made someone an heir to their father, joint-sharers in all his possessions and fully united to him. Echoes of scripture.

So, we return to our theme – In Jesus we belong to the Father

The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.

Yes, the language is male dominated but that reflects the imagery metaphor Paul was using – the result for us as believers is still the same. The end of our reading in Romans speaks again of being God's children. Today we recognise that we are children of our mothers, natural and spiritual – we may have inherited some of their features, mannerisms, out-look on life, genetics as well as learnt behaviour.

I wonder what we think/imagine our inheritance is with God, with God the Father?

As an aside the passage/chapter remind me of the work of the Trinity – the work together for our salvation and opportunity to be at peace with our God.

We are to live as spiritual people, in the Spirit – sometimes church life feels very mundane and about structure etc, so let us remind ourselves that as children of God, as those who in Christ belong to the Father, we are to bring the life of the Spirit in every bit of our individual and cooperate life.

We are no longer slaves ruled by fear but having received salvation – being no more in condemnation -we now belong to the Father. Meditate on that awesome fact and pray how it might affect/encourage/change our pilgrimage with our God and one another. Amen