

## THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

A sermon delivered by Pastor Brett Sisley

To the congregation at Bellevue Church on 17 April, 2016

Last week, Pastor Peter spoke to us about the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. He used words like “advocate,” and “battery” to describe the effects. I love that word *battery*. As some of you may know, I build and race radio control scale race cars. These aren’t the kind of machines you find at Radio Shack or Toys R Us. The kind of cars I build and race come in several hundred pieces. They’re composed of space-aged materials like carbon fiber, titanium, and 7075 T6 aluminum. And they travel at speeds of over 100mph. There are gas-powered versions of these cars available. But the cars I race use batteries for power.

Aside from mechanical issues pertaining to the drive train, tires, and track surface, the all-out horsepower potential of these vehicles is determined by a combination of three factors: motor, speed control, and battery. To win races you need a good motor—and good usually means hand-built out of hand-selected parts; specially tuned and geared for peak performance. The speed control is another essential element for maximum speed. The speed control regulates the amount of voltage flowing into the motor. If you’re going to perform at your best, you need to have a good speed control. Good for a speed control is measured in efficiency, which means that only a small amount of voltage will be lost to resistance. The third and most critical piece to the horsepower puzzle is having a powerful battery. No matter how great your motor, and no matter how efficient your speed control: without power you’re going nowhere.

And this is why Peter’s use of the word *battery* hits home with me. The Holy Spirit is the battery that powers the believer’s life. Without the Spirit of God living inside you—charging you up from within, you’re going nowhere as a believer. My prayer for us this morning is that we would learn something about the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and the race His power prepares us to win.

Something else Pastor Peter emphasized last week is that the Holy Spirit is a person. I want to reemphasize this truth because **unlike the impersonal power of a battery, the power of the Holy Spirit is expressed in relationship.**

Will you please open your Bibles with me to the book of Romans, chapter 8? We find our text here this morning, from verses 12 to 17.

Writing to the Christian church in Rome, the Apostle Paul says this:

<sup>12</sup>Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup>For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup>For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup>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.” <sup>16</sup>The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

You might find this interesting... Did you know that the greatest concentration of Bible verses speaking about the Holy Spirit is found here, in the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of Romans? It’s not in 1 Corinthians 12, where Paul discusses the operation of spiritual gifts in the church. It’s not in Ephesians 4, where we read about the Five-Fold Ministry Gifts given by Christ to the church. It’s not even in Acts, where the promised Holy Spirit comes as a mighty wind and empowers men and women to engage in the work of Christ. No...the Holy Spirit is mentioned most often in the eighth chapter of Romans—18 times in fact.

Surprising as this might be, I think it’s actually quite appropriate. Let me tell you why: Romans is a book of doctrine. It accounts to us with legal precision the faith on which we stand. Romans 3:23 states that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” Romans 6:23 tells us “the wages of sin are death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” 10:29 promises that “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” This is Romans. It’s doctrine. It’s pure, rock-solid, and foundational. And it’s here that the Greek word *Pneuma*, translated as “Holy Spirit,” appears most often *and* for a very good reason; because **the most critical aspects of the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives can and should be known**. The Third Person of the Trinity is not some mysterious force. He is a person who loves us and who desires to be known. If we are to live lives charged with the electrifying power of God, we must come to know intimately the person of the Holy Spirit.

Look with me at verse 13. “...if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the [Holy] Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” In reading these words, we are glean a life-changing truth; that **living, thinking, feeling—making decisions with our corruptible bodies and minds—leads inevitably to the corruption of death**. “But...” Paul says, “if by the [Holy] Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live.”

Notice the word “by,” meaning “by the power of the Spirit.” There was a cartoon when I was a boy, called *He-man, Master of the Universe*. Anyone remember it? When the

good-guy, He-man, needed super power to defeat Skelator, the bad guy, he would lift his sword into the air and say: “By the power of Grey Skull, I have the power!” Now, this definitely *not* the kind of power Paul is talking about when he specifies “by the Spirit...” This might sound funny, but there’s actually a nugget here that we need to grab ahold of. And here it is: **How do we tap into, walk in step with, and apply the power of the Holy Spirit?**

Return with me again to our text. This time we’ll pick it up in verse 14. “*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*” There are two words here I want to dial into. First, “led;” it says “as many as are *led* by the Spirit...” Now, think for a moment about “led,” or “being led.” What images come to mind when you hear these words? You don’t see power terminals or jumper cables. There’s no Harry Potter or Dumbledore. And...there’s no He-man. Rather, ***being led in this sense conveys an image of trust by the one who follows—and a demonstration of compassionate leadership by He who leads.*** It’s a warm, relational picture, as opposed to a cold, institution rendering.

Verse 13 concludes by describing those who are being led—the trusting ones—as “the sons of God;” and I would add: daughters—as in: *the sons and daughters of God are those being led by the Spirit of God.* Kind of sounds like Psalm 23, doesn’t it? “Lead me beside the still waters [...and] in the paths of righteousness [...] for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” The Holy Spirit is a person—and not just any person—He is the third person of the Trinity; He *is* God. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm, the Father is the “Good Shepherd.” In John 10, Jesus is “the Good Shepherd.” As we walk day to day, it is the Holy Spirit as our loving shepherd who leads us. The three are one.

## START TO RAMP IT UP

The Disciple John said of Jesus that: “He who was in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him” (Jn. 1:18). God the Father has made Himself known through His Son, Jesus. He has furthermore made Himself known through the person of the Holy Spirit. **This is why it is so vitally essential that we find Him in the Scriptures: because the Father has revealed Himself through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the Word of God.** You hold it in your hands...the very essence of the creator God! How can it be that we would fail to find Him here—beautifully, lovingly, graphically revealed? How can it be that anyone who is called by the name of Christ would ascribe to the Holy Spirit actions and behaviors that are not evidenced in God’s Word? Could it be that we need to spend more time learning to hear His voice speaking to us through the pages of the Bible?

Verse 15 continues... *“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 have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear. These words are quite similar to what we read in 1 Tim. 1:7. *“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.”* **Because of who He is and what He desires, He has given to us the Spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind.** Because God became man, we who live in these mortal shells are no longer bound by the corruption sentenced to them by sin. We have received the Holy Spirit of adoption. From within our withering flesh the very life of God cries out: “Daddy! I love You!”

Cally and I are less than a month away from welcoming Elias Theodore Sisley into this world. Those who are parents know what a breathtaking event the birth of a son or daughter is. I will never forget the first time I saw Kelsen, our first-born. I remember watching intently, not wanting to miss it. And in the twinkling of an eye...boom...there he was! I remember tears of elation shooting out from my eyes! *His* eyes weren't even yet open yet. He was wet with amniotic fluid. His skin was pale, and a little green. But there he was: a brand new human being in flesh and blood.

As beautiful as that moment was, and as many billions of times it's been multiplied, it's harrowing to acknowledge that **we welcome these precious little persons into a life of corruption.** From their first breath, their body drinks in the dominion of the prince of the power of the air—that universal state of lostness we've inherited from Adam. They, like the rest of us, will know corruption...and eventually...death.

It sounds dispiriting, doesn't it, to muddle the innocence of birth with burden of death? And the reason, I think, is because—to us—with so much life behind, a newborn represents a new beginning; for them the flower of life has yet even to bud, and then to bloom. But they will grow, and in time, learn to cherish vanishing vapor of human life.

It's to us, humans of physical birth made alive in Christ that Paul declares: *“...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.”* **As our human birth subjected us to corruption, our spiritual rebirth in the likeness of Christ bequeaths unto us eternal personhood and unbroken belonging.**

The Holy Spirit is one with God. There is no separation, no tension between them. Unlike our rebellious human spirit, the Holy Spirit dwelling in us desires only to please the Father. This same Holy Spirit is He who lovingly guides us.

To live, move, and find our being in God is to “be led by the Spirit.” In the church we can ascribe all kinds of things to “being led by the Spirit.” But **foremost among them all is that we would surrender the leadership of our lives to the loving Spirit of the living God.**

Verse 16 continues this thought... “*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God...*” The Spirit bears witness *with our spirit*. No longer is the relationship between us and God marked by separation and alienation brought on by rebellion. **That the Holy Spirit of God would be so closely related with the spirit of man is nothing short of a miracle.** But this is what the Word of God decrees. The Good Shepherd is holding our hand. QUESTION: **And what flows most naturally from this relationship? Consummate personhood.** It says that the “Spirit Himself bears witness *with* our spirit that we are children of God.” **The Holy Spirit’s work in our lives tells us who we are—by signifying *whose we are!*** What a blessed “we.” *We:* Our truest selves in concert with the Holy Spirit of God declare with one voice: We are sons and daughters of God! Can somebody say AMEN!

**This is the work of the Holy Spirit: He tells us who we are!** He reminds me of the “me” I was created to be. And it is so much more than what this frail shell calls “normal,” calls “free,” calls “fun.” We are *eternal* beings. Our appetites and tastes will begin to reflect this as we walk hand in hand with the Holy Spirit. *We are* sons and daughters of God! We have been adopted by the King of Kings, the sovereign Master of the Universe!

There is something else we need to take from this, and here it is: **to receive the Holy Spirit of adoption and to become sons and daughters of God means that we are truly brothers and sisters with one another.** In the words of Sister Sledge, “We are family!” ...And not merely in some token sense. To the same degree that we are *personally* children of God, we are called to embrace the spiritual kinship which we have inherited. Like the Brady Bunch, “this group must somehow form a family.”

**Understanding the work of the Spirit in our lives expresses itself as much horizontally as it does vertically.** Being “led by the Spirit” is not an individual thing. There is one Holy Spirit in whom all of our voices find harmony. **WE...** cry out: Abba! Father! It’s for this reason, the Apostle Paul exhorts:

*“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called,<sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,<sup>3</sup> endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.<sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;<sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism;<sup>6</sup> one*

*God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:1-6). Amen and amen!*

## TRANSITION TO CLOSE

A few weeks ago, we celebrated the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Easter is watershed event for Christians. "Because He lives," goes the refrain, "I can face tomorrow." Without Easter, we wouldn't be here, doing this. But the ministry of Jesus didn't stop with the resurrection. It wasn't fully complete when He ascended into heaven. The ministry of Jesus Christ continued. 50 days after Easter, Jesus sent the promised Holy Spirit to empower believers to continue His work on earth. We call this day *Pentecost*, which simply means: "fiftieth." T

oday is day 22. May 15<sup>th</sup> will be day 50. And on this 50<sup>th</sup> day from Easter, we will be holding a special event both commemorating Pentecost and celebrating its continuing power to transform lives. Following the morning service that Sunday, there will be a time of teaching regarding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. And after this, the pastoral staff of the flock at Bellevue Church will pray that our brothers and sisters would receive the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to engage in the work of Christ. This is going to be a turning point for this church—or perhaps it is better said, "turning-on" point.

Ephesians 4:8 tells us that *"When Jesus ascended He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men."* Each of us has been given supernatural gifts designed to build the church and to draw men and women to Christ. These *spiritual* gifts are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Imagine a church composed of living stones that like embers glow with the very presence of God.

I encourage each of us to seek God's leading on this matter. Spend time in God's Word. Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit. If you have questions, please...speak with one of the pastors. God has called us to assist you. Serving, loving, supporting you is what we have been gifted to do.

Let's pray...

Father: we are so blessed to be called your children. Jesus: thank you standing in our place and for loving us with your life. Thank you Holy Spirit for leading us. I ask: *"that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, <sup>18</sup> the eyes of our understanding being enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance*

*in the saints,<sup>19</sup> and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph. 1:17-19).*

*“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,<sup>21</sup> to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph. 3:20-21).*

Have you heard from God this morning? What a blessing that is. The last thing I want to say is this: Spiritual adoption begins with salvation. If you have yet to make Jesus the Lord of your life, I invite you to come and speak with me or one of the pastors after we dismiss. God loves you so much. Today could be...your spiritual birth day.

READING OF BENEDICTION AND DISMISSAL