

**Adoption—Romans 8:14-16—1/11/2026**  
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In January each year, many churches remember the Sanctity of Human Life to recall the gift of each person made in God's image.

We honor life beginning at conception in contrast to the culture of death that excuses & promotes abortion.

Be clear—abortion is killing a baby inside his or her mother's womb.

Abortion is using chemical or physical weapons to end the human life developing in the protective care of a mother.

We must always call that evil & call for repentance from such murder.

But we don't want to ONLY point out evil—we also want to model what is truly right & good.

We also want to joyfully display God's design in the most basic norms & we want to faithfully invest in solutions to sin's troubles.

That's why we celebrate biblical marriages & the gift of children & dedicate ourselves together to generational ministry.

At times like tonight's service, we celebrate parent-child dedications.

And the value of every human life is why we support the Blue Ridge Women's Center as they share the Gospel & meet needs.

It's also a reason we honor ministries like foster care & adoption.

So for this year's remembrance of the Sanctity of Human Life, let's consider the spiritual & physical analogy of adoption.

And to start, we need to distinguish how Scripture speaks of all humans in God's image but does not call all people children of God.

Often when people describe everyone as God's children, they mean that we are all created by God as equals in His image.

They mean what James 3:9 says to condemn the cursing of men, "*who have been made in the likeness of God.*"

So we should guard how we speak of other people & we should also have compassion on them and pray for their eternal souls.

Sometimes such good desires are couched in terms of us caring for our fellow humans or by wrongly claiming we are all children of God.

Or it may be put in terms of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

Those descriptions are well-intended, but such uses of those terms are not precisely right & biblical.

So to introduce this & understand adoption rightly, we must grasp that we are NOT born naturally into God's family.

We are not naturally born as God's children in the spiritual sense.

In Psalm 51:5, David spoke for all of us in saying, "*I was brought forth in iniquity. And in sin my mother conceived me.*"

He did not mean that his mother sinned in how she conceived him.

He meant that he was like every other human who inherited Adam's original sin from the point of conception.

So like you and me, David was born a sinner.

Only the Virgin-born God-man Jesus was not born in sin and so only He was always humanly in God's family.

As Jesus said of Jews in John 8, they were of their father the devil.

As Ephesians 2 says, we were all by nature children of wrath.

Ephesians 2:1-3 tells us “*you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature children of wrath**, even as the rest.*”

So we were not born as children of God.

We were born as children of sin who deserved wrath.

God is our Creator and Ruler, but because of sin we are born as His **enemies**, **not** as His friends.

Because of sin, we are born as aliens who are not welcome in God’s country & as strangers who are not welcome in God’s spiritual family.

That is the natural state of every person born into this world.

So being a **child of God** is **not** based on merely being born human.

John 1:12-13 defines who is a child of God & how that occurs.

John 1:12-13 says “***as many as received [Jesus], to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.***”

So the only people who are children of God are those who are born of God, *born of the Holy Spirit* in regeneration, new birth.

And how do we receive that new birth?—if we want it, how do we get spiritual birth that is a gift from God & a work of God?

We cannot create it or effect it on our own, but we’re told to receive it, to believe in Jesus’ name, to trust in Him.

We trust that Jesus’ life provides our righteousness & His death provides payment for our sins & His resurrection provides certainty.

So Galatians 3:26 says we are sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, trusting who Jesus is & what He has done.

That’s the only way to be born spiritually & be welcomed by God.

In John 3, after Jesus made Nicodemus feel helpless to cause his own spiritual birth, He called him to trust in Jesus.

The offer of John 3:16—that whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, comes to those who know they cannot begin their own spiritual life.

So that’s an introduction of how to become a child of God—it’s by trusting & receiving God’s work, not by human effort.

And that’s what physical adoption models—it starts with the initiative of parents seeking a child & the child receiving that love & new life.

That’s all introductory to help us think about spiritual & physical adoption—to frame the transcendent beauty of it.

But then we need to ask—how do we know we have that relationship?

What does a relationship of a true child of God look like?

How do you know you have it & what should you be seeking in it?

And here is where we turn to **Romans 8:14-16** today to find 3 clear characteristics of those who are God’s children.

I want you to know the power & wonder of being adopted by God & to be motivated in every area of life by that loving relationship.

So we’ll outline 3 characteristics of God’s children from Romans 8:14-16 to help us evaluate our relationship with God.

So turn there & let's read this context of Romans 8:1-16. [READ]

Romans 8 is written to give assurance of eternal life to those in Christ Jesus, to those born of God's Spirit into a new life.

And after describing what is true of such Christians in verses 1-11, verses 12-13 state our related obligations.

We don't live under a debt to pay service to the flesh.

Rather, we live continually going into greater debt of receiving God's grace by the Spirit's ministry in and through us.

That is something we can never pay back or never should try.

Instead, it is our enjoyment of God to forever receive from Him as the fountain of all blessings as the only true source of good.

And since we act through faith in Christ as the one who purchased it all, all our receiving is by grace alone.

But we receive God's goodness as He defines it in His Word.

And verse 13 says when that happens, the result is that we put to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit.

And if by the Spirit we are killing the deeds that sin fosters in us, then we will live real eternal life in a growing relationship with God.

John Owen summed this up by saying that we must 'be killing sin or it will be killing you.'

Be killing sin or it will be killing you—that's a good summary because this is an eternal life or death issue.

Either you live according to the flesh & face eternal death in the lake of fire or you kill sin by the Spirit & enjoy eternal life.

Please hear those only two options presented in Romans 8:13.

But stop & think—why is killing sin a mark of true Christians?

It is because of the life and work of God the Holy Spirit.

Killing sin is what the Spirit does in God's true children.

If the Holy Spirit is in us, then He should make us holy, right?

That is holy from the inside out, striving to put sin to death starting with heart desires like pulling up weeds by their roots.

So having the Holy Spirit means that He effects change in you.

That change is what marks us as belonging to God's family.

So let's note that as a 1<sup>st</sup> point today about God's children—God's children are those with **purifying activity by God's Spirit**.

#1—God's children have **purifying activity** by God's Spirit.

Each of today's 3 points from Romans 8:14-16 are descriptions of what the Holy Spirit does in God's children--#1 is **purifying activity**.

God's children are known by God's life in them and God's life is given and proven by His Spirit.

Read verse 14 of Romans 8 to see this 1<sup>st</sup> point. [READ]

The verse begins with 'for' because it is an explanation.

It gives the reason we live forever in relationship with God if we are putting to death the deeds of the body.

The reason is because your killing of sin proves that you are a certain kind of person.

That term “all” in verse 14 in the NAS is not the normal word for all.

If you have an LSB or NKJV, you’ll see it better translated as “as many as” because the emphasis is on that kind of person.

The point is to describe all the kind of people described in verse 13—they are of a certain type of people.

They are sin-killing people because they are led by the Spirit.

Killing sin by the Spirit, as verse 13 says, is explained in verse 14 as being **led by the Spirit**.

It’s key to understand that’s what it means to be Spirit-led here.

Some think of being led by the Spirit as being led in decision-making about where to live or whom to marry or which job to take.

And the Spirit does use His Word and the needs around us to direct our desires in ways that guide us to do as He wants.

But that’s not what verse 14 is talking about.

Here being led by the Spirit is being empowered by the Spirit to understand His truth & apply it to put to death sinful deeds.

It’s not like the Spirit is a tool we use to fight sin.

Instead, we are the tool the Spirit is shaping to make us more useful.

#1, God’s children have that purifying activity by God’s Spirit.

If you are a Christian, the reason you can change your ways and kill sin is because God’s Spirit indwells you and enables you to do so.

That is both a warning and a great hope and help.

It is a warning because if you have no desire or power to kill sin in your life, then you must not have the Spirit.

And if you do not have the Spirit, you must not be a Christian.

That’s the warning here.

In contrast, the hope & help of these verses is that if you do desire to kill sin, you can depend on God’s Spirit to help you.

If you do want to change your ways and follow God’s ways, then trust Christ as your righteousness and depend on the Spirit to help you.

Then enjoy God working in you by His grace as you grow.

And when you experience victory and change, be thankful.

Rather than getting proud of changes we make, realize that true spiritual growth is all a gracious work of God in us.

So we respond with humble praise of God for His work in us and we rejoice in being His children.

And remember here that being children of God—or sons of God as verse 14 puts it—means enjoying a relationship & family resemblance with God.

Think of this—when Jesus said in Matthew 5:44 to love you enemies, do you know what reason He gave in the next verse?

Matthew 5:44 says to love you enemies and then verse 45 says because it will show that you are sons of your Father in heaven.

God loves His enemies, right?—He loved us when we were enemies.

Romans 5 says when we were hostile, enemy sinners against God, He demonstrated His love for us in that Christ died for us.

So when we love our enemies, we display God-like character, we act like we are sons of our heavenly Father.

And here Romans 8 adds that when we kill sin, we show that we are connected to the eternal life of God.

When we live like that, we experience true life and we are assured of that life with God abounding forever.

That's the connection between verse 13 when it promises that you will live and verse 14 when it says these are sons of God.

If you are a son of God—a child of God—you have life & will live.

And if you are a son of God, then you are born of God's Spirit and your life proves that by the changes God makes in you.

If you are a child of God, then you will display the characteristics of being in God's family.

You will live like God in your character and love and holiness.

That's what verse 14 means when it says, 'for as many as are being led by the Spirit, these are sons of God.'

#1—God's children have purifying activity by God's Spirit.

To know if you are a child of God and not a child of wrath, consider if the Spirit has changed you and is continuing to change you.

The Spirit makes God's children look like Him as their Father.

And the Spirit also makes God's children love their heavenly Father, which brings us to our 2<sup>nd</sup> point for today.

#2—God's children have practical affection by God's Spirit.

And I mean family affection for God as our heavenly Father.

Read Romans 8:15 to see this affection for God. [READ]

Paul clarifies what kind of spirit the Holy Spirit is when Christians receive Him at the point of conversion.

We do not receive a spirit of slavery leading again to fear—that's not what defines a right relationship with God.

As verse 1 says, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.

So entering into a relationship with God through faith in Christ should not lead to fear of punishment or condemnation again.

Romans 6 teaches that becoming a Christian is a change of masters so that we are no longer slaves of sin but become slaves of God.

But this new slavery to God is real freedom because it is not the rule of the law condemning us as never measuring up.

It is a freedom of being fully accepted based on Jesus' perfect record.

We rest in what Jesus has done and we are freed up to gladly serve God as our new master who desires our good.

Rather than being a slave of sin that destroys us, in Christ we become slaves of God who empowers us to live His design.

In Christ, we are slaves to God, but we do not serve out of fear of punishment or out of fear that we'll not measure up.

So it's in that sense that Romans 8:15 here says Christians have not received a spirit of slavery leading again to fear.

As 1<sup>st</sup> John 4:18 says, "*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.*"

When the love of God enters our hearts through the Spirit, then we move from fear-based motivation to love-based motivation.

And notice the amazing contrast of verse 15—we move from slavery to the full adopted status of sonship.

Adoption is the loving choice to take a child not born into a family & to give the loving relationship & legal status of a child in the family.

That is a transfer of legal status, motivational basis, emotional responsiveness, and so much more.

And verse 15 says that's what God does for those He saves.

So rather than drudgery or fear-based living under God, true Christians enter a life of family affection and love for God.

The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of adoption, of new life in our souls that legally transfers us to the fully adopted status of sons.

Rather than children of wrath, we become children of God.

Rather than being outside of God's family as His enemies who could not get any blessings or privileges or inheritance of the family, Christians are adopted children who get it all.

Just as Jesus is in God's family and deserves God's family riches, so God grants those blessings to all who trust Christ.

That is superlative, glorious love in the doctrine of adoption.

As Romans 5:5 puts it, God pours out His love in our hearts by the Holy Spirit & that work of love is by the Spirit of adoption.

With that Spirit in us as Christians, we should certainly not respond to God with slavish fear or reluctant indifference.

Such love should compel us to respond with love & glad faith.

It only makes sense to eagerly seek to know and enjoy this wondrous heavenly Father and to experience all it means to live in His family.

*As Jesus said in Matthew 7:11, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"*

So this is an intensely **practical** impulse by the Spirit of adoption to move us to continually cry out to this God as our loving Father.

It only makes sense to have loving **affection** for God that **practically** leads to humble, eager trust in Him.

We call upon Him in intimate terms like 'Abba', Aramaic for 'Daddy.'

And we trust His every word as our all-wise, always faithful, loving heavenly Father.

Whether your relationship with your earthly father was wonderful or terrible or somewhere in between, being adopted spiritually into God's family is better than any comparison can quantify.

We are welcomed into the precious intimacy Jesus experienced with the Father as He lived by the Spirit in His time on earth.

And just as Jesus modeled in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark 14:36 in prayer, we who trust Christ cry out "Abba, Father" as His children.

It is like a reflexive response to this new relationship by the Spirit that we continually call upon Him as our loving Father.

Prayer should be one **practical** outflow of being adopted by God.

The context of this crying out in Romans 8 must include a longing for deliverance from sin in this world.

This cry must include the desire to be free from sin practically and to see this world and its people set free from sin.

And that's why this love for God and crying out to Him should drive true Christians to be people of compassion.

That's why God's children ought to truly care for fellow members of God's family in the local church and in the church around the world.

And that's why God's children ought to pray for and reach out to the lost and be meeting real needs in the world.

One of those needs is certainly to reach needy children.

The marvelous display of God's adopting love for us is a reason Christians should care about adoption ministries.

Since Christians are adopted by God, we can gladly open our hearts and wallets and homes to promote and possibly pursue adoption.

If we are in God's family, then like Jesus said about loving our enemies, we should display God's love in all kinds of ways.

All such displays of God's love begin and flourish in true Christians because God begins and flourishes His love in us.

And that is this work of the Spirit we find in verse 15.

It is our 2<sup>nd</sup> point today defining God's children—point #2—God's children have practical affection by God's Spirit.

As Jesus said, you will know Christians by their love—both by their love for God and by their love for each other and others.

The child-like, trusting, cry to God as our Father is the root of that loving affection that the Spirit creates.

Now read verse 16 for our 3<sup>rd</sup> & last point today. [READ]

We've seen that God's children have (1) purifying activity by God's Spirit, (2) practical affection by God's Spirit, and now 3<sup>rd</sup>ly personal assurance by God's Spirit.

Verse 16 draws together what's already been described in verses 14-15 but it is significant to note on its own because it brings us back to the main point of the section.

The main point of this section is to give assurance to true Christians.

So #3 God's children have personal assurance by God's Spirit.

We've seen that it is a ministry of God's Spirit to change us to kill sin and to display God's character of holiness and love.

And it is a ministry of God's Spirit to evoke cries of faith and responses of love to God.

So also it is a ministry of God's Spirit to take all those and testify together with us that we are God's children.

God's own Holy Spirit bears witness with our own inner spirit through all His workings we've described.

As Jesus said in Matthew 7, you will know people by their fruits.

The good fruit of God's Spirit that we experience assures us that we are truly the children of God.

The Spirit uses all we've described to grant us assurance that God really is at work in us.

The Spirit assures us that we did not produce the changes for good and the godly affections and the fruitful ministries.

And therefore, the Spirit encourages assurance of our salvation.

That is what Romans 8:16 is talking about.

And it is another supernatural wonder of the Christian life.

All people are not born as God's children—we are born sinners, born as children of wrath.

But by His grace God creates children born by His Spirit into new life.

And those children display God's glorious, good character and they lovingly trust and seek God as their highest treasure.

Those are the kind of people who are children of God.

Those are the kind of people who prove God's life is in them and who show their family resemblance to God as their Father.

Those are people for who **have purifying activity, practical affection, & personal assurance by God's Spirit.**

So here's the vital question—are you one of those people?

Are you really a child of God?

Or are you merely a religious person who follows some rules but has no real love and trust in God personally?

Are you merely someone who tries to obey God to make your life better but who has no love for God as your heavenly Father?

What is the real condition of your soul?

If you do not have the real life of the Spirit described in Romans 8, then I urge you to plead with God not to leave you alone.

Beg God to show you His grace and run to Him with faith in all He has done in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

We'd love to talk with you more to help you after the service.

And if you do know this wondrous adopted status as God's child, then enjoy it and display it and share it.

Respond to this glorious salvation by seeking God & killing sin & crying out for deliverance & showing this love to others.

I praise God for the evidence of His Spirit in so many of you & the wondrous fruit of His life and power at work among you.

Let's pray that will increase & abound—pray with me as we close.