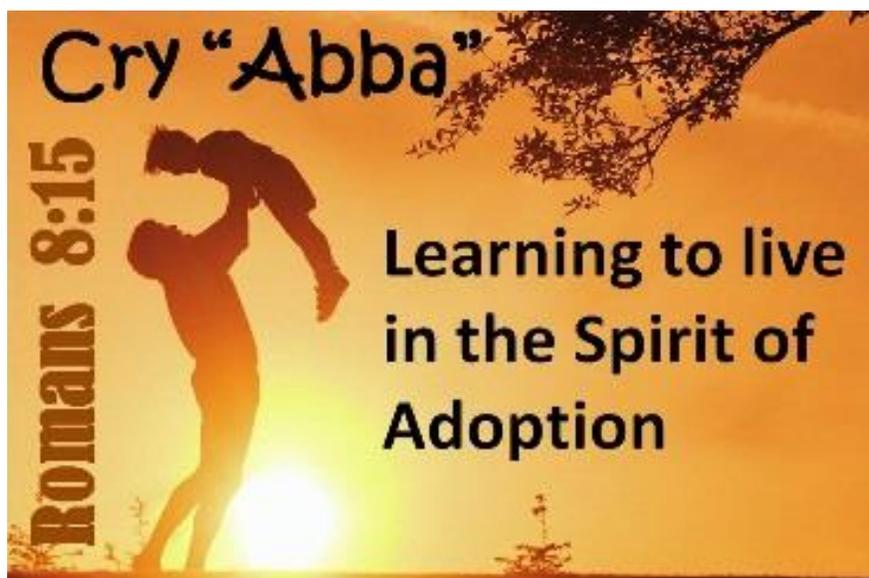


Basic Training Bible Ministries



“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.’”

Romans 8:15

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“Cry ... ‘Abba, Father’”

Learning to Live in the Spirit of Adoption

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Introduction

This study of spiritual adoption will hold many surprises for us. Not only is God the Father treated slightly in most works on theology, but the concept of sonship by spiritual adoption is scarcely understood.

Because of the biblical meaning of the term “*adoption*,” our study is forced to take a practical approach to the relationship of the believer to the heavenly Father. This approach is demanded by each of the passages in which the phrase “*Abba, Father*” is found.

It is my fervent prayer that this effort will be a labor of love both by teacher and student, and will be blessed by the Spirit of God with the life-changing impact demanded by the subject. Those who receive these truths, presented with humility and reverence, cannot fail to increase their store of spiritual treasure allotted to each and every child of God (Eph 1:3).

Format

The approach of this conference will differ a bit from previous ones. In each study, we begin with a premise, a statement of biblical fact. This is matched with a Scripture passage that affirms the truth. A brief analysis of that text will follow, and be reinforced by other passages that build the case for that concept. Each section will conclude with principles of application.

This approach is intended to remove the study of the heavenly Father from the realm of theory or speculation, and to provide steps to be taken by each student/disciple to come to know the Father in a personal and practical daily relationship. As with any other relationship, our spiritual fellowship is built on understanding, rapport, interaction, and sympathetic goals and objectives. As we learned in the study “Knowing God” (2014 NoVA Bible Conference based on the Book of 2 Corinthians), our intimacy with the Almighty is gained through joint participation. Look at this study as a spiritual “workout” plan, or like a disciples’ “to do” list, and draw near to the Father day-by-day.

God our Father (Matthew 5–7)

Most of us, as Christians, do not realize just how explosive and radical were the concepts introduced by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. In particular, His constant reference to God as “*Father*” would have been considered revolutionary in that time and place. Furthermore, when Jesus speaks about God to the disciples, He refers to Him as “*your Father*” fifteen times. Once, in His instruction on prayer, He uses the term “*our Father*,” and He concludes the discourse by referring to “*My Father in heaven*” (Mat 7:21).

This discourse alone would have been sufficient to turn the religious authorities against Him, for they never would have presented God as “Father” to the common rabble. Then, to teach them to open their prayers with “*our Father in heaven*” would have been a far too familiar way to address “*the Most High God*” (Mar 5:7). Finally, Jesus, who claimed to be the “*Son of God*” (Mat 11:27; Joh 9:35), places these disciples into the intimate family relationship which He shares with the Father (Mat 11:25–27). This would have enraged the Pharisees beyond measure.

In this message, Jesus makes three main points about the Father:

1. God’s children are to live in such a way as to glorify the Father (Mat 5:16).
2. The Father will reward those who so live (Mat 5:46, Mat 6:1, Mat 6:4, Mat 6:6, Mat 6:18).
3. The Father is faithful to supply our needs, if not our wants (Mat 6:25–34, Mat 7:7–12).

Yet the idea of God as Father to the believer, as seen throughout the ministry of Jesus, did not yet include the concept of adoption as later presented by the Apostle Paul. Not only is the Doctrine of Adoption part of the revelation of the “*mystery*” of Church-Age truth (Eph 1:5–9), but it places the believer of this Age (between Pentecost and the Rapture) in a position of great privilege—also of great responsibility. Therefore, let us “*gird up*” our minds (1Pe 1:13) for the purpose of both learning about our adoption and living in the power of it.

STUDY ONE:

The Ancient Meaning of “Adoption” Implies Both Privilege and Responsibility

*“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.’” Rom 8:15*

Chapter 8 of Romans concludes the section of the book on sanctification (Romans 6–8). The emphasis is on the work of the Spirit of God (who is mentioned 18 times) in the life of the child of God.

The theme of the chapter is found in Rom 8:2, where the “*Spirit of life in Christ Jesus*” is seen as the liberating force of new resurrection life (see Rom 6:4). This Spirit is received at the moment of salvation (Rom 8:9–11), enabling us to live righteously (Rom 8:3–8), well pleasing to God. That the Spirit of God gives “*life to your mortal bodies*” (Rom 8:11) speaks not of future resurrection, but rather of living a resurrection life now (Rom 6:4, Rom 7:6).

Entrance into Manhood

The word “*adoption*” in Rom 8:15 is *huiiothesia*, which literally means “to be placed in the family as an adult son.” This is not the adoption of one from outside the family, but the entrance of the youth into manhood. This was usually done between the ages of 12 and 13, and conferred not only status and privilege but also the duties and obligations of adulthood (see Gal 4:1–2). With this status came the right of inheritance, which could be either enhanced or forfeited, due to one’s conduct.

These spiritual obligations are laid out in the paragraph of our text (Rom 8:12–17), where six great truths are declared. They are:

1. The indwelling of the Spirit places us under obligation to live according to the Spirit (Rom 8:12).
2. Due to this, all life in the flesh leads to “death,” that is, it will pass away (cf. 1Jo 2:17), but life in the Spirit remains forever (Rom 8:13).
3. Those who are habitually led by the Spirit demonstrate a mature sonship worthy of our spiritual status (Rom 8:14). The word “*sons*” is *huios* (adult son), showing that the issue here is maturity, not salvation.
4. Thus, in contrast to the fear and slavery produced by the Law, we enjoy the Spirit of adoption, which cries “*Abba, Father,*” just as Jesus Christ did in the Garden (Mar 14:36). This cry does not connote infancy—as some suggest—but rather the intimacy of maturity!
5. It is in this daily practice of mature sonship that the Spirit testifies to our relationship to God (Rom 8:16). The carnal believer is, therefore, often plagued with doubts regarding his/her salvation.
6. With this confirmation comes also the assurance that we are indeed “*heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ*” (Rom 8:17), that is “*if*” we share His sufferings, so as to share His glory (compare 2Ti 2:12).

It is taken for granted here that “*all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*” (2Ti 3:12), and that this is the spiritual requirement for reigning with Him (see also Jam 1:12 and Rev 3:21). By comparing other “adoption” passages, we can reinforce these lessons.

Spiritual Orphans or Adopted Sons (Rom 5:12; Joh 14:18)

All mankind is alienated from God due to the sin of Adam. We are born spiritually dead—separated from God. Therefore, we are spiritual orphans; and only by adoption through faith in Christ is the soul once again “at home” in Christ (1Co 15:22). Jesus used the term “*orphans*” to describe the condition of the soul apart from the indwelling Spirit (Joh 14:18). Having lived in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (who also brought the presence of the Father, Joh 14:8–9), the disciples would be “orphaned” by His departure unless the Spirit came to them.

We often stress the need of the soul for salvation—deliverance from sin and its effects. But the positive side is that every soul cries to be reunited with the heavenly Father. We see the effects of the absence of earthly fathers all around us in society. Young men who grow up without a father present grow up angry, belligerent, and violent. They strive for a manhood they have not seen modeled and, therefore, fall prey to false standards of what it means to be a man. How much greater is the problem of a world—deprived of the Father through sin—attempting to make sense of the purpose of our existence? The answer is given in Eph 4:17–19, showing the destructive spiral of the spiritual orphan. Only spiritual adoption can fill this void in the human soul.

The Father's Pre-Determined Plan (Eph 1:3–14)

In this extended sentence, the apostle seems almost breathless to describe the Father's plan for those who are *"in Christ."* He begins with a benediction of praise to the Father who has thrown open the storehouse of heavenly blessings on His "elect." Eph 1:5 declares that all these riches of His grace are due to His predetermined plan of adoption, that is, to place us as mature sons in His family. The *"us"* refers only to the believers in the Age of the Church, between the day of Pentecost and the Rapture. Therefore, "election," as used by Paul here, does not refer to who will believe, but to what those who believe in this Age will receive.

In eternity past, when the Father chose the Son to die for a race not yet created (Mat 25:34; 1Pe 1:20; Rev 13:8), He also *"chose us in Him before the foundation of the world"* (Eph 1:4). Jesus Christ is the eternally *"Elect One"* (Isa 42:1). Before creation, the Father determined that all who are "in Him"—meaning Church-Age believers only—would share that election. Therefore, this "election" does not apply to believers of any other age. The Calvinist sees, in this concept, simply God choosing who would believe in Christ. What Paul is saying here is something far greater than a fixed determinism, and cannot refer only to believing, since it does not include either Old Testament, Tribulation, or Millennial saints. Just as the "election" of Israel placed them under a unique status, with special privileges and corresponding duties (Rom 9:4–5), so it is with the Church. In neither case is it a choice as to who will believe, as is proved by the unbelief of Israel (Rom 9:30–33)—God's elect nation.

By *"the good pleasure of His will"* (Eph 1:5), the Father pre-determined that those who believe in Christ would share the position of Christ as "Son of God." Adoption places the Church-Age believer into the Royal Family of God with all the provisions, privileges, and responsibilities of adult sonship. Our standing before the Father is *"holy and without blame"* (Eph 1:5), *"accepted in the Beloved"* (Eph 1:6), *"redeemed and forgiven"* (Eph 1:7), *"heirs of God"* (Eph 1:11, cf. Rom 8:17; Gal 4:5–7), and *"sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise"* (Eph 1:13–14).

Paul continues to add up the riches of our position through the first three chapters of Ephesians. God the Father has bestowed upon us all of these blessings because of the work of adoption!

Cry "Abba, Father" (Mar 14:32–38)

Paul obviously takes this phrase from the words of Jesus in the Garden. It is significant that only Mark records this incident. Because he wrote from the recollections of Peter, we have a first-hand account of one who was nearby as our Lord went through His agony. No doubt, Peter heard these words fall from the lips of Jesus. And they are filled with spiritual significance.

Jesus is facing the crucifixion, and no more shameful or painful death could be imagined. Not only the agonies of the cross, but the judgment of all the sins of mankind, must be borne. He prays that, if possible, the cup of suffering might be taken from Him. Though it **was** possible for Him to escape the suffering (see Mat 26:53), it would mean the plan of redemption could not be accomplished.

In this anguish of soul, Jesus cries out, “*Abba, Father,*” both as a declaration of trust and of submission. The will of the Father can only be ultimately good, and obedience to His perfect plan can only bring the ultimate of blessing. It is due to Jesus’ confidence in the Father that He is enabled to say, “*not what I will, but what You will.*” The cry speaks both of His exalted position, as well as His awesome duty to the Father. To the Son of God, trust in the heavenly Father called for an obedience that was equal to that trust.

Obedience to the Faith (Rom 1:5)

It is a common saying in the military that “rank has its privileges.” In the spiritual realm, with Jesus Christ as the ultimate example, rank has its responsibilities! No one understood the “*riches of His grace*” better than the Apostle Paul (Eph 1:7, Eph 1:18, Eph 2:7, Eph 3:8, Eph 3:16). To him, it was revealed that with these great privileges came awesome responsibilities.

Paul begins the book of Romans by matching his great privileges with equal responsibilities. In Rom 1:5, he says, “*Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name ...*” Most commentaries see this as “obedience through believing,” or in other words: **if I believe, I have been obedient.** Paul’s conception is far greater. To him “*obedience to the faith*” implies a lifestyle that confirms and gives evidence of that faith.

After all, it is “*by one Man’s obedience*” that many are made righteous (Rom 5:19). Jesus Christ, in the decision of the Garden, becomes the true standard of “*obedience to the faith.*” The obedience Paul has in mind is the “*obedience leading to righteousness*” (Rom 6:16, Rom 6:19–23). His apostleship was not just to evangelize, but “*to make the Gentiles obedient*” (Rom 15:18), for which reason he rejoices in the obedience of the Roman saints (Rom 16:19). The “bookends” for the celebrated book of Romans is “*obedience to the faith*” (Rom 1:5, Rom 16:26), by which “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith’*” (Rom 1:17).

Applications

1. Living in the “*Spirit of adoption*” means to accept the great duties and obligations that accompany our great privileges in Christ.
2. To “*walk worthy of [our] calling*” (Eph 4:1) implies obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit as a habit and rule of life (Rom 8:14).
3. The results of this spiritual conduct will be confidence in time, and assurance of reward in eternity (Rom 8:16–17).
4. Every believer is an “[heir] of God” (Rom 8:17a; 1Pe 1:4–5), but to be a “*joint [heir] of Christ*” comes with spiritual obligations (Rom 8:12 the negative, Rom 8:17b the positive).
5. If you call God your heavenly Father, doesn’t this carry with it the burden to live in such a way as will honor Him (1Pe 1:17–19)?

STUDY TWO:

The Heavenly Father is the Author of Our “So Great ... Salvation” (Heb 2:3)

“Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Col 1:12–14

“Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken by angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him ...?” Heb 2:1–3

It requires both of the above passages to grasp the fullness of our opening statement. In the first, the work of the Father is extolled, in particular that of qualifying us to share in His inheritance. This qualification consists of transferring us out of the kingdom of darkness and delivering us into the kingdom of light—that of His beloved Son. This transfer is initiated on the basis of the redemptive work of Christ.

Then in the second, the author warns the Hebrew saints of the danger of drifting away from the truth found in Jesus Christ. As sure as every disobedience in Old Testament times received just reward (i.e., judgment), so even we shall not escape divine justice if we neglect *“so great a salvation.”* It is a sad commentary on the spiritual condition of the Church today that the truth declared in both of the above passages is almost never taught in most churches. It is high time we *“gird up the loins of [our] mind”* (1Pe 1:13) and seriously contemplate what is being said here!

Join me in considering five great truths:

1. Salvation is a Comprehensive Term (Rom 5:8–10, Rom 8:29–30)

Both of the above passages take us from the moment of faith in Jesus Christ (initial salvation) all the way into eternity future (ultimate salvation). Or, put another way, from salvation begun to salvation completed. The term “salvation” as used in the Bible has a broad range of meaning, all the way from deliverance from any physical or mental trouble, to receiving eternal life (regeneration), to spiritual growth (sanctification), to our final state in heaven (glorification). In Rom 5:8–10, Paul distinguishes between past “justification” and “reconciliation” and ongoing deliverance in the Christian life, *“we shall be saved by His life.”* This refers to “phase two salvation,” or what we term sanctification.

These three phases are all part of the plan of God for every single believer. The author of Hebrews is warning those who already have eternal life (including himself, by using *“we ... us”*) of the very real danger of apathy regarding that which they can still forfeit—the finishing of their

race and the reception of corresponding eternal reward—and indicates that there is much included in their “*so great ... salvation*” beyond the possession of eternal life.

2. The Scope of the Father’s Work is Greater than that of the Son (Joh 10:29)

This statement will no doubt “rattle the cage” of many who have become used to the neglect of the work of both Father and Spirit—each playing their own unique part in the over-arching plan of God. We rightly honor Jesus Christ for His sacrifice on the cross that makes our redemption possible.

But consider that the plan was the Father’s (Eph 1:3–11; Col 1:19–20, pay attention to the pronouns!):

- a. It was the Father who sent the Son into the world (Joh 3:17, Joh 3:34, Joh 4:34; 1Jo 4:14);
- b. the Father raised Him from the dead (Act 13:33–34; Rom 6:4; 1Co 15:15);
- c. it is the Father who draws men to Him (Joh 6:37, Joh 6:44) and gives each believer as a gift to Christ (Joh 6:37, Joh 17:6);
- d. it is the Father who disciplines every believer (Heb 12:6);
- e. the Father will raise us from the dead (1Co 6:14);
- f. it is the Father who will ultimately reward us according to our deeds (Mat 6:1, Mat 6:4, Mat 6:6; Rom.2:6); and
- g. it is the Father to whom Christ will deliver the kingdom (1Co 15:27–28).

How great is the work of the Father on our behalf! In fact, no sooner did He rest from the work of creation, than He began working for our redemption and glorification (Joh 5:17). It is for this reason that Jesus often said that His Father was greater than Himself (Joh 10:29, Joh 13:16, Joh 14:28) for He is the authority over Him (1Co 11:3).

3. Spiritual Diligence is Required to Realize Salvation’s Full Potential (Heb 2:1, Heb 4:11)

It is obvious that the opposite of apathy or neglect is diligence. And we are constantly challenged in Scripture to exercise diligence in regard to our spiritual life (Heb 2:1, Heb 4:11, Heb 11:6; 2Pe 1:5, 2Pe 3:14). While it is abundantly clear that we cannot lose eternal life, it is possible to lose eternal reward (Col 2:8; 2Jo 8; Rev 3:11).

The bottom line of eternal reward is that every child of God will receive an inheritance (1Pe 1:4–5). This is based on sonship alone. However, to some will be given the right to reign with Christ (Rom 8:17; 2Ti 2:12; Rev 3:21). Those who bear much fruit glorify the Father (Mat 5:16; Joh 15:8), and to them are given the greater rewards.

4. Only the Virtues of Faith, Hope, and Love Can Carry us Through (1Co 13:13)

The Apostle Paul tells us, “*and now abide faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love*” (1Co 13:13). Our western minds think of this as comparing three separate things, of which one is the superior. That is not what Paul is saying. Rather, the three are all to be

connected, as three levels of spiritual attainment, each built on the other. The word “*greatest*” is not a comparative, but a superlative.

We begin our spiritual journey by simple child-like faith in Jesus Christ. Our first hope is that of forgiveness or of receiving eternal life. This is realized instantly (though the new believer often faces doubts). It is only when we begin to grow in our faith that we realize there are many unrealized hopes (spiritual potentials) awaiting us. Like mountain peaks on the horizon, there is spiritual growth, maturity, sanctification, service, then eternal rewards for the believer, and so on. To live in the light of this hope will never disappoint us (Rom 5:5) because as we pursue our spiritual potential, the love of God is being “*poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*” By this process, we begin to move into the pure atmosphere of a deep, abiding relationship of love between us and the members of the Godhead, with particular focus on the Father (1Jo 2:15, 1Jo 3:1–3, 1Jo 3:22, 1Jo 4:17–19). It is worth noting that John, the disciple Jesus loved, imitates his Master, speaking of the Father 13 times in the little book of First John.

Consider that “*faith, hope, and love*” are held up as the chief spiritual motivation—if not virtues—in Rom 5:1–5; 1Co 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; Col 1:4–5; 1Th 1:3; 1Ti 1:1, 1Ti 1:5; Heb 6:10–12; 1Pe 1:3, 1Pe 1:5, 1Pe 1:8, 1Pe 1:21–22—and this list is incomplete!

5. Salvation’s Full Potential is Realized Only by Those who Finish the Race (Mat 24:13)

Jesus said, “*But he who endures to the end shall be saved*” (Mat 24:13). It is due to so many people misunderstanding the usage of the word “*saved*” in the Bible that this verse is often misused to imply loss of salvation for those who fall by the wayside. In reality, the full potential of salvation is indeed lost, but that has nothing to do with eternal life. What is Jesus speaking of being saved from, in the context?

“Then they will deliver you up to tribulation ... And then many [believers] will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another ... And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.

But [by contrast] he who endures to the end shall be saved.” Mat 24:9–10, Mat 24:12–13

The point is that spiritual endurance, in the face of persecutions and betrayals, will deliver one from losing spiritual momentum and thus, also deliver from loss of reward—a key focus of this discourse (see Mat 25:1–30).

This is the very same message the author of Hebrews is urging on his listeners in Heb 2:1–4, Heb 3:12–14 (“*we have become partakers of Christ if we hold ... steadfast to the end*”), Heb 4:11–13, Heb 6:1–8, Heb 10:35–39, Heb 12:1–3, etc. Only those believers who cross the finish line of life, “[strong] *in faith, giving glory to God*” (Rom 4:20), will realize the full potential of their “*so great ... salvation!*”

Applications

1. The work of the Father in our salvation is historically overlooked in Christian writings and messages. We must give the Father His proper honor!

2. The full scope of salvation is little understood in Christian circles, and must be understood in its three phases: regeneration, sanctification, and glorification.
3. These three phases closely relate to the three virtues of faith, hope, and love. A case might even be made for them to be related to their specific focus on the work of the Son, the Spirit, and the Father.
4. The great dangers facing every believer are apathy toward and neglect of the Word of God, love of the world, comfort-seeking, and all-around lack of the fire of spiritual diligence.

STUDY THREE:

By Adoption, Believers Share the Sonship of Jesus Christ to the Heavenly Father

“For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you.’” Heb 1:5

This quote comes from Psa 2:7, in connection with the promise of the Messianic kingdom. In the context, the nations join in rebellion *“against the LORD and against His Anointed”* (Psa 2:2). This anticipates the crucifixion, where the Romans, Greeks, and Jews united in crying out *“crucify Him”* (Mar 15:13). In mockery, the title *“THE KING OF THE JEWS”* was placed on the cross in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew (Luk 23:38).

The Psalmist records the divine response, *“He who sits in the heavens shall laugh”* (Psa 2:4). The Almighty then declares, *“Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me, You are My Son, today I have begotten You”* (Psa 2:6–7). It is of utmost importance to understand what exactly is being said here.

Begotten by Resurrection (Luk 1:32–33)

The word *“today”* marks a specific historical event. It is not the virgin birth, but rather the day of resurrection. In order for Jesus Christ to be the King over an eternal kingdom, He had to be crucified and raised again. The promise of Gabriel to Mary demands this, *“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end”* (Luk 1:32–33, see also Dan 2:44).

Further identification of *“today”* as the day of the resurrection is affirmed by the Apostle Paul in Act 13:32–33, *“And we declare to you glad tidings—that promise which was made to the fathers. God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten you.’”* Again, in Heb 5:5–6, we find that the statement from Psa 2:7, *“You are My Son, today I have begotten You”* is connected to Psa 110:4, *“You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”* It is evident that Jesus did not enter into His high-priestly role until after the resurrection (see Heb 8:1–6).

The Sons of Light (Psa 110:3)

The adoption of believers during the Church Age is unique in all history. As we have seen, this adoption places us as adult sons, with full access to the Father's resources, and carries great responsibilities.

In Psa 110:3 David says, "*Your people shall be volunteers in the day of Your power; in the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth.*" In connection with Psa 110:4, I take "*the womb of the morning*" as the resurrection morning. Because of this victory, new power is given to men, resulting in a company of volunteers who demonstrate the power and beauty of holiness (compare Psa 27:4, Psa 29:2, Psa 96:9). Here is a fascinating definition of what spiritual life/resurrection life, should look like. It should be a demonstration of both the power and the beauty of holiness!

Too often what is passed off as holiness in Christian circles is nothing but pompous self-righteousness, without true power—and anything but attractive. No one can read the Gospels with an open mind and fail to see both the power and the beauty of the life of Jesus Christ. In Him, the perfect balance of "*grace and truth*" (Joh 1:14) produced a magnetism of character that drew—rather than repelled—the common people.

As John tells us, "*in Him was life, and the life was the light of men*" (Joh 1:4). Like a beacon in the darkness, the life of the Lord revealed to men what God the Father intended life to be—in all its simplicity, purity, and humility. This life of power is conferred on every believer at the point of entering eternal life, by the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The true power and beauty of the life of Christ is experienced and demonstrated in what the Bible calls "*the fruit of the Spirit*" (Eph 5:8–10; Gal 5:22–23). This is nothing more than the life of Jesus Christ being lived through us by His Spirit.

What Manner of Love (1Jo 3:1–3)

That we should be privileged with such potential was amazing even to John, the closest of Jesus' disciples. He marveled as he wrote: "*Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*" (1Jo 3:1). He goes on to say that our great hope is that "*we shall be like Him*" (1Jo 3:2) in the resurrection. But rather than stop there, with our blessed hope, he continues, "*And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure*" (1Jo 3:3).

The potential of every child of God is that of being a living reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This process of sanctification (1Th 5:23–24; 2Ti 2:21; Tit 2:11–14) is the ongoing work of the Spirit of God in our lives from the moment of regeneration until we enter our glorification in His presence. The point here is that no believer can "*abide in [His] love*" (Joh 15:10) without being transformed into His image.

Bearing the Family Likeness (Rom 8:29–30, Rom 12:1–2)

The ultimate goal of the Father, for every child of God, is that each one be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29–30). To what degree this will be true in our lives here and now is dependent on our submission and spiritual growth. Spiritual transformation requires unconditional, personal submission to God and faithful learning and application of biblical truth to life (Rom 12:1–2).

It is the birthright of every believer to “*walk in newness of life*” (Rom 6:4), but the experience of resurrection life is not automatic. The adoption practiced in the ancient world gave to the adult son both resources and responsibilities. Diligence was required to appropriate the one and to fulfill the other. So it is in our spiritual life.

The indwelling Spirit of God uses the written Word of God to “[transform us] *into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord*” (2Co 3:18). Two sources of power are at work here: the Spirit and the Word. It is clear that our transformation will be directly linked to the accurate, consistent, diligent study of God’s Word, followed by faithful, practical application to life. The life of the living Word is imparted by the written Word, into which the Spirit of God breathes life and power—as at the resurrection. There is no other way to realize and experience the power and beauty of our adoption life!

Applications

1. Every child of God, by faith in Jesus Christ, shares in His unique sonship.
2. This implies possession of His resurrection life, to be lived out by the power of His Spirit.
3. As “*children of light*” (Eph 5:8), we have both the power and the duty to live in such a way as to point men to “*the Light of the world*” (Mat 5:14; Joh 8:12, Joh 9:5).
4. As the Father, in His love, has bestowed on us this sonship, so we—in response to that love—are to manifest Christ-likeness in our lives.
5. As in every area of spiritual life, this is not achieved by personal effort, but by faith-response to His Spirit and Word.

STUDY FOUR:

Every Believer is Under the Training of the Father

“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.” Heb 12:6

One of the great omissions of teaching in today’s churches is the subject of divine discipline. Because of ignorance on this topic, many believers fall for the “loss of salvation” lie, while others despair that, due to their failures, they have never “really” been born again. In context (Heb 12:3–17), the author here zeroes in on a number of major truths that are being tragically neglected in our time.

Even the Lord Jesus Endured the Father's Discipline (Heb 12:3)

Though Christ was born without a sin nature, and lived a sinless life, the discipline of the Father was essential to the running of His race (Heb 12:1–2). The word “discipline,” while having a bad connotation in most minds, is precisely the point I want to make. Even Christ Himself came to “perfection” under the Father’s discipline. The word “chastening” or “discipline” in Heb 12:5 is exactly the same as the word used in 2Ti 3:16 for “*instruction in righteousness*.” It is the word *paideuo*, which means “child training,” not used in any sense of wrong doing, but encompassing all aspects of training up a child.

Consider the fact that, “*though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb 5:8–9).

This suffering under the Father’s guiding hand included every form of temptation (Heb 2:18, Heb 4:15), as well as opposition and persecution (Heb 12:3). The point is that Jesus Christ, as our “elder Brother,” has faced and endured anything and everything we may face—and more. Yet He never faltered in honoring the heavenly Father in these trials.

For this reason, it is so important that we “*consider Him*” (Heb 12:3) above and beyond even that “*cloud of witnesses*” (Heb 12:1) listed in chapter 11 of Hebrews. All of them failed at times, but He never did. The word “*consider*” comes from the word *logizomai*, a bookkeeping term that means “take into account,” and the preposition *ana*, which implies repetition. In other words, “keep taking into account” the example of Jesus Christ. Reflect on, meditate on, and learn from His example recorded in the Gospel accounts. Then, become an imitator of His life, by faith.

Neglect of the Doctrine of Discipline is Disastrous (Heb 12:4–8)

Why have these Hebrew believers become “*weary and discouraged*” (Heb 12:3)? According to the author, it is because they have neglected the Doctrine of Discipline in their learning! They had given up the fight even before they had “*resisted to bloodshed*” (Heb 12:4).

The verb “*forgotten*” is speaking of a condition resulting from their own action of neglect (middle voice), defined here as “[despising] *the chastening of the Lord*.” Apathy to biblical truth always has its own tragic effects on lethargic believers. In this instance, five great and comforting truths have been disregarded:

1. Discipline is an evidence of the Father’s love in desiring to bring growth and maturity to believers (Heb 12:5).
2. Discipline is a proof of our sonship—an evidence of salvation (Heb 12:6).
3. Discipline is the natural and profitable duty of the Father toward His children (Heb 12:7).
4. Absence of discipline may be cause to question one’s claim of sonship (Heb 12:8). In other words, “*by their fruits you will know them*” (Mat 7:20).
5. The Father matches the discipline to the offense, as illustrated by the three levels of discipline: exhortation (Heb 12:5), rebuke (Heb 12:5b), and chastening (Heb 12:5–6) and

scourging (Heb 12:6b). The more severe the discipline reveals a prolonged pattern of disobedience.

In Gal 4:1–2, we learn that prior to the time of “adoption,” sons were placed “*under guardians*” whose task it was to train him up so as to be ready for the demands of adulthood. No father who wants his son to be successful as a man will ignore the need for discipline!

Strict Discipline is a Mark of a Wise Father (Heb 12:9–10a)

The discipline of earthly fathers is always imperfect. Each of us must learn to accept and forgive this lack. But to the degree we are disciplined, we learn to respect our earthly father. Usually, fathers who fail to discipline end up losing the respect of their own children.

Abraham is an example of a wise and faithful father, as recorded in the Lord’s testimony of him in Gen 18:19:

“For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice, that the Lord may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him.”

We also have examples of fathers who failed to discipline their sons. Though a faithful priest, Eli did not train up his sons—much to his disgrace (1Sa 2:12–17). God said to Eli, “[You] *honor your sons more than Me*” (1Sa 2:29). This failure on his part brought about the deaths of his sons (1Sa 2:31–34, 1Sa 3:13, 1Sa 4:17). Another example is David. One of the many great failures of King David was his lack of discipline to Absalom, which bore tragic fruit (2 Samuel 13–15).

All the Father’s Discipline is Aimed at our Blessing (Heb 12:10b–11)

All earthly fathers are fallible in their exercise of discipline. However, the heavenly Father never fails and is never too lenient or too severe. If we can learn and accept this one truth, it can help us in facing any trial we must endure. God aims at imparting His own holiness in His children. We must learn to think of holiness not only in terms of purity from sin, but also in the sense of “wholeness” and “wholesomeness.” Too often, the idea of holiness conjures up a form of smug self-righteousness. It should instead cause us to think in terms of spiritual healthiness.

In fact, one of Paul’s favorite words is “*sound*,” which he applies to teaching (1Ti 1:10; Tit 2:1), thinking (2Ti 1:7), speech (2Ti 1:13; Tit 2:8), and faith (Tit 2:2). The word he uses, *hugiaino* (according to the *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, in reference to 1Ti 1:10, pg. 616), means “*to be healthy, to be sound. The word denotes the wholesomeness or healthiness of true Christian teaching.*” All of the above are summed up in the term “holiness.” It is toward this priceless spiritual health that the heavenly Father disciplines us. Therefore, both teaching and discipline work toward “*instruction in righteousness*” (2Ti 3:16).

The Only Proper Response to Discipline is Correction (Heb 12:12–17)

Many times, as believers, we resent the Father’s discipline, and by this, reject the working of His love on our behalf. This can lead to a “*root of bitterness*” (Heb 12:15) which becomes a hindrance both to ourselves and to others. Disobedience, once it has been exposed through discipline, must result in humility, confession, and correction.

We will never “*make straight paths*” for our feet, until we admit we are off track and in need of “strengthening” our flailing hands and “*feeble knees*” (Heb 12:12). Like a runner (Heb 12:1–2) who is struggling, we need to get our “second wind” in order to finish the race. Those who persistently fail to come to correction will end up like Esau (Heb 12:16–17) and find, only too late, that they have bartered away eternal rewards that cannot be reclaimed. Esau’s “fornication” was not sexual, but spiritual, in that he exchanged his birthright and blessings for immediate gratification. Once completed, his self-betrayal left “*no place for repentance,*” which points us back to the statements in Heb 6:4–6. There is, after repeated and persistent unfaithfulness, a point of no return. This applies to the loss of blessings in this life, and rewards in the next. It has nothing to do with loss of salvation—which is impossible.

Applications

1. Spiritual discipline and correction demonstrate the Father’s great love for each of His children.
2. We must learn to see, in every hardship and trial, the hand of our Father training us up to spiritual strength.
3. The Father uses trials and difficulties to train us in endurance—a key theme of Hebrews 12 (see Heb 12:1, Heb 12:3, Heb 12:7).
4. As Paul tells us in Rom 5:3–5, “*perseverance*” (endurance) produces “*character,*” which also brings a “*hope*” that never disappoints.
5. This hope rests on the outpouring of the love of God the Father through His indwelling Spirit. We will see more of this in the next study.

STUDY FIVE:

The Fellowship of the Father both Sustains and Sanctifies Us

“Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Rom 15:5–6

This benediction of the apostle expresses his universal hope for all Christians (see 1Co 1:10). This unity of thought, word, and deed is the fulfillment of the High-Priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus in Joh 17:20–23. If the whole scope of the Father’s will for the family of God could be summarized, it is found in this statement. The indwelling Spirit produces this family unity in us.

It is crucial to note that the Father here is designated as “*the God of patience and comfort.*” Spiritual comfort cannot be separated from the endurance of faith. Those who are unwilling to “stand firm in the faith” (1Co 15:57–58) are unlikely to experience much of His comfort.

When we develop spiritual endurance, we have the resources to give comfort, aid, and instruction to those who are faltering. “*We who are strong ought to bear with the scruples [infirmities] of the weak, and not to please ourselves*” (Rom 15:1). We come to desire and encourage their growth and stability; and in this unity of mind and purpose, the heavenly Father is glorified.

It is the “*mercies*” of God that supply our weaknesses, and by this supply we receive “*comfort.*” One of our great areas of infirmity is that of doubt. God meets this need through the supply of biblical truth, from which comes conviction—a great source of comfort. When we fail, He forgives, cleanses, and restores us to useful service (Psa 51:1–2, Psa 51:12–13; 2Ti 2:20–21). In the strength of these undertakings, we are then able to comfort others.

Why does God the Father allow His children to suffer? The answer is given in the 2Co 1:1–11: It is so that we, in the imitation of the Father, might learn to be merciful, to comfort, and to strengthen others who also suffer. But we cannot minister with that which we do not have!

The Pathway into the Father’s Love (Joh 15:9–14; 1Jo 2:3–6, 1Jo 2:13–14)

To give strength to others demands that we develop strength within ourselves. This is not an automatic process. It requires diligent faith, built on a steady diet of biblical truth, followed by consistent daily application of truth to life.

The Father’s love is constant to each of His children. However, if we do not respond to and reciprocate that love, our experience of it is minimal. The soul that is obedient to the Father’s commands enters into a depth of intimacy and fellowship that the apathetic believer cannot know (Rev 3:19–20). Since no one is perfectly obedient, this entrance into the “*secret place of the Most High*” (Psa 91:1) is a never-ending adventure of personal discovery and transformation (see 1Jo 2:3–6, 1Jo 2:13–14).

The Spiritual Link Between Conduct and Comfort (Joh 14:21–24; 1Jo 2:28–3:3)

The passage in John 14 reinforces the point, made above, that depth of fellowship is what determines degree of comfort and communion. It is essential that we define “fellowship” as unity in both thought and action. To have fellowship is to agree with God in how life is to be lived, and then to live it! Mental assent without practical outcome is hypocrisy.

One of the greatest forms of divine comfort is “*hope,*” as we have seen earlier. Hope looks to the future, anticipating the fulfillment of God’s promises. In the passage from 1 John, we see that genuine hope has a transforming effect on our lives. Furthermore, those who are mature, the “*fathers*” of 1Jo 2:13–14, are those who have come to “*know Him from the beginning.*” The words “*who is*” (verse 14) are not in the original.

A case might be made that those who attain maturity are diligent in learning of Him “*from the beginning*” of their acquaintance at salvation. In confirmation of this, 1Jo 2:24 reads, “*Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.*” This is identical to John 14:21–23.

Conviction is the Foundation of Comfort (Heb 6:18–20, Heb 3:6, Heb 3:13–14)

The writer to the Hebrews declares that our hope in Christ is “*an anchor of the soul*” (Heb 6:18–20). In the midst of life’s uncertainties and ever-changing conditions, it provides us with stability and peace. The strong, inner conviction of truth permits us to “[enter] *the Presence behind the veil,*” the place of comfort and security (Heb 6:19, see also Psa 91:1).

But what of those believers who lack this conviction? Actually, it is to those very souls the book of Hebrews is written, in the hope of strengthening their faith. Looking at his earlier exhortations (Heb 3:6, Heb 3:13–14) we find two conditional statements. In Heb 3:6, he says, “*But Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*” In order to understand this, we have to think in ancient terms. The issue here is not that of relationship, but rather of obedience to the Son who has been placed over the household. Those who refuse to submit to the Son have effectively placed themselves outside the fellowship of the household—exactly the issue with the prodigal son, Luk 15:11–32. In leaving home, he was rejecting the elder brother’s leadership, as much as the father’s authority. In terms of eternal reward, it remains true, “*He who endures to the end shall be saved*” (Mat 24:13).

Looking further at Heb 3:13–14, this principle is reinforced. We need to exhort one another (fellow believers) daily against the subtle, soul-hardening effects of sin’s deceitfulness. The reason given is that “*we have become partakers of Christ.*” The word here is from *metecho*, which speaks of “a partner, sharer, an associate, joint-owner.” It is closely associated with the word Jesus spoke to Peter in Joh 13:8 which is *meros*, speaking of the “part or portion” that is shared.

The condition is that we are partakers of Christ, “*if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.*” We can again see the parallel with 1Jo 2:24. Loss of conviction, due to spiritual inconsistency, means not only loss of comfort in time, but also loss of reward in eternity. How critical it is that we remain diligent in our study, steadfast in our conviction, and faithful in our daily service!

Applications

1. In this section, we see the importance of the two greatest commandments come into focus (Mat 22:37–40).
2. Fellowship with the Father is not an end in itself. Neither is the personal attainment of spiritual maturity the end game.
3. True intimacy with the Father cannot be divorced from ministry and service to others.

4. To know the Father's sustaining comfort is to come under His obligation to minister that comfort to others in need.
5. The whole spiritual life is a cycle of obedience to the Father in service to others, in order that we might come to know Him more deeply and serve Him more faithfully.

STUDY SIX:

Fellowship with the Heavenly Father Implies Intimate and Effective Prayer

“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in You, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you will be My disciples.” Joh 15:7–8

The subject and practice of prayer seems to be a mystery to many believers. Effective prayer is too often thought to be shrouded in secrecy, a discipline for the select few. In reality, prayer is the most fundamental form of communion between the Christian and the heavenly Father.

The key to effective prayer is found in the text above. It is really one condition, having two sides. First, “*abide in Me*” speaks of a consistent life of fellowship and obedience. None of us are perfect, and none are always obedient. However, we can be spiritually attentive to our faltering way, and correct it often. Second, “*My words abide in you*” means not only consistent Bible study, but also that the Word learned comes alive in our lives through practice.

It goes without saying that no one can “abide in Christ” without His Word living in us, and no one will have His Word abiding in them, unless they are abiding in Him. Each is dependent on the other. To such a disciple, the “desire” will be brought into conformity with the Word and will of the Father; therefore, the prayer will be effective.

The Model Prayer (Mat 6:7–15)

Everything Jesus says in this section confirms what is said above. It is clear that prayer is not seeking to bend the Father to our will, but to discern His will regarding our needs.

While there is certainly benefit to learning this prayer by heart, and even reciting it, that is not its full intent. Jesus said, “*Pray ... in this manner,*” in other words, here is a model to follow.

Enough has been said and taught about this prayer to save going into detail. It is sufficient to note that every request (there are seven) is in perfect line with the revealed Word of God regarding His will for us:

1. That the heavenly Father be glorified
2. That His kingdom come (how we long for it!)
3. That His “*will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (this includes dependence upon Him that we be an instrument of His will)
4. That He give us our daily supply (bread representing our physical needs, see 1Ti 6:6–8)
5. That He “*forgive us our debts,*” our sins and failures
6. That He give us grace to forgive those who have wronged us

7. That He “*does not lead us into temptation*” (includes any form of trial, see Jam 1:2–15), but rather “*deliver us*” from evil (literally “*the evil one*”)

Using this as a prayer template, consider how many useless things we pray for while ignoring these fundamental spiritual requests, which in fact fall into three categories:

1. First and foremost, spiritual priorities. God is glorified when His kingdom lives in those who do His will. This demands self-denial (Luk 9:23), and is often contrary to our desires (Rom 14:17).
2. Next, that our basic physical needs be met so that we can fulfill the purpose of the above. The whole purpose of our living is to do His will (2Co 5:15; Gal 2:20, Gal 5:25; Phi 1:21; 2Ti 2:12).
3. Finally, that we practice the essence of the Gospel message, both by receiving and by giving forgiveness to others. This was the primary lesson of Jesus to the disciples in the Upper Room (Joh 13:3–17, see also Eph 4:32).

Prayer to be Addressed to the Father (Joh 14:16, Joh 15:16, Joh 16:23)

We do not need to labor this point, but it must be made. Jesus addressed His prayers to the Father. He taught His disciples to address their prayers to the Father, in His (Jesus’) name.

Though the members of the Godhead are co-equal and co-eternal in essence, they are not equal in function. Always, the Father is given the role of the superior (Mat 10:29; 1Co 11:3). The Father did not die for us, the Son did. And the Son does not bring regeneration to the believing soul, the Spirit does (Eph 1:13–14; Tit 3:4–5). Believers who pray to Jesus with their requests, and then thank the Father for dying for us on the cross too often confuse the unique role of each. This does not hurt God, but it does demonstrate a dire lack of understanding. For those who choose to be contentious, I can only say that they have no biblical grounds for their practice.

Let me quickly add that I do pray to the Lord Jesus, to thank Him for His work on the cross. I also pray to the Spirit, and thank Him for His guidance and convicting ministry. But, if we are to be faithful to the Bible, our requests are to be made to the Father (see Eph 1:17, Eph 3:14).

Faithful Prayer is Powerful Prayer (1Jo 5:14–15; Mar 14:36)

The points made above regarding the model prayer are confirmed by John in his epistle (1Jo 5:14–15). Simply put, if we pray according to His will, as revealed in His Word, we can have the confidence that our request will be answered. He does not say that it will be answered as we might assume, but it will be answered in the way that is best.

This brings us to our Lord’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mar 14:36). Here is the only passage where we find our Lord uttering the words, “*Abba, Father.*” Much sentimental hash has been made of this being a prayer “like that of an infant’s cry.” To that I say, “Baloney!” Why?

In this prayer, at the most critical moment of our Lord's life, He is in total command of His mind and soul. He fully knows what He is facing, and expresses the very human desire that that "cup" might be taken from Him (see Mat 26:36–46; Luk 22:40–46). Three things should be noted:

1. In all the passages cited above, the prayer was offered with the caveat, "*if it is possible*" or "if it is Your will." Thus, in the gravest extreme, we see Jesus subordinate everything to the Father's will.
2. The request was concluded with a declaration of total submission to the plan of the Father, "*Your will be done.*" Jesus knew without question that the cross was the Father's will for Him.
3. Therefore, the cry "*Abba, Father*" is, rather than "the cry of an infant" as some suggest, the strong declaration of Christ in His maturity (see Heb 5:8–9).

One more little fact needs to be understood for us to gain the full benefit of Christ's example. It was, in fact, possible for Him to evade the cross! But only by His own choice, as He said to Peter, "*Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?*" (Mat 26:53–54). Nothing else could so confirm the points made above, that "*Abba, Father*" is a cry of surrender and mature responsibility. To pray faithfully is to pray according to faith, which takes God at His Word (Heb 11:6).

Applications

1. Effective prayer is the privilege, prerogative, and power of every child of God.
2. Those who live in the fellowship of Christ learn to pray according to the Word of God.
3. Prayer is a ministry, and like all ministry is to be sacrificial and self-denying. It is given to us for the benefit of others (1Co 12:7).
4. Unconditional submission to the will of God is necessary, for rather than changing God's mind, prayer is designed to conform us to His will.
5. If we spent less time praying for ourselves, and more time praying for others, we would no doubt see more answers to our prayers.

STUDY SEVEN:

The Outward Evidence of Sonship is Active Service to the Father

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." Mat 5:16

Salt and Light (Mat 5:13–16)

Jesus is speaking here to those who are His disciples (Mat 5:1–2). If we are persecuted for His sake (Mat 5:11), then we ought to also live for His sake. Salt has both a flavoring and a preservative power. But salt leached of its flavor is of no value. Light makes it possible to navigate through the darkness without stumbling. But, again, light placed under cover is worthless.

The thrust of these simple illustrations is that disciples are to make a difference in the world around them. The “*blessed*” qualities of true discipleship (Mat 5:3–10) are the very things the world hates and persecutes. But it is by these characteristics that we are enabled to glorify the Father in Heaven.

Today, we are living in a time of increasing persecution around the world. In America, this is taking the form of extreme ridicule, ostracism, and even legal charges. But whether the threat is public shaming or beheading, the disciple must not compromise his conduct of conviction for the sake of comfort. We have been called to live our lives outside our comfort zone!

Laborers in the Harvest (Mat 9:37–38, Mat 10:5)

Jesus was “*moved with compassion*” (Mat 9:36) for the multitudes, and He shared His burden with the disciples. He urged them to take the first step of service, which is to pray. Specifically, they were to ask that the “*Lord of the harvest*”—the heavenly Father—send out workers.

I believe this is one time the disciples did as they were asked. The reason is that in Mat 10:5, Jesus Himself sent them out. The prayer was heard, and the Father sent those who prayed to now fulfill the ministry. In this way, the disciples became the answer to their own prayers. The prayer of Isaiah, “*Here am I, send me*” (Isa 6:8), was not, “Here am I, send someone else”!

On another occasion, Jesus reminded the disciples that they had a duty to bring in the harvest (Joh 4:35–38). This is the obligation, the “debt” (Rom 1:14), of every child of God. To each one is given “his own work” (Mar 13:34), a task “*according to his own ability*” (Mat 25:15). How we choose to fulfill our God-given task is the evidence of how much we truly love and honor the Father. The depth of our faith is shown in the abundance of our fruit.

Spiritual Fruitfulness (Joh 15:8, Joh 15:16, Joh 17:18–19, Joh 20:21)

In the above verses, two great truths are made clear:

1. That the Father is glorified as we “*bear much fruit*” and
2. That the Father sends us into the world, just as He sent His Son, Jesus Christ.

It is clear that the obedience of the Savior glorified His Father (Joh 17:4). In return, the Father glorified the Son equal to His submission (Phi 2:5–11). Now we are given the same commission (Mat 28:18–20): to bring the Father glory and honor through our lives. To the degree of our faithfulness, we also will share in His glory (Mat 25:21, Mat 25:23).

We have only this life to demonstrate our gratitude for “*so great a salvation*” (Heb 2:3). The “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Gal 5:22–23) is the inner dynamic from which all outward fruit must come. It is this that is the content with which the Spirit of God fills the humble and surrendered life (Eph 5:18).

Ambassadors for Christ (Rom 1:14–17; 2Co 5:14–17)

In the Romans passage cited above, the Apostle Paul identifies four qualities of the faithful servant of God. First, they live with a sense of spiritual debt (Rom 1:14). Throughout this study, I have stressed that with spiritual privileges come responsibilities. Paul lived with a keen sense of indebtedness for the grace he had received.

Second, there is the quality of readiness (Rom 1:15). This comes from steady preparation for the task at hand. To be ready (the word implies eagerness) takes more than just willingness. It requires the diligence of daily preparation, so that our capability meets opportunity.

Third, there is a determined mind-set not to be ashamed of the Gospel message (Rom 1:16). To this world, the message of the cross of Christ is foolishness (1Co 1:18, 1Co 1:21). To proclaim it is to invite scorn and mockery. The messenger must have an assurance that this message contains “*the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes*” (Rom 1:16).

Finally, the disciple who intends to be “[obedient] *to the faith*” (Rom 1:5) will resolve to “*live by faith*” (Rom 1:17). Nothing gives greater evidence to the power of faith than the life that is built on faith. To live by faith is to demonstrate resurrection life (Rom 6:4). Living by faith means walking in the power of the Spirit of God (Rom 7:6; Gal 5:16). Such a life is an object lesson, to all who observe it, of the truth and power of the Word of God.

Where the Romans passage deals primarily with inner qualities, the 2 Corinthians passage shows the transforming effects of this inner dynamic to outward life. Of these, there are four:

1. First, the inner dynamic of the life of faith is the compelling love of Christ, which can never remain passive in the face of needy souls (Mat 9:36).
2. Second, driven by His love, the disciple can “*live no longer for themselves*” (2Co 5:15), but lives for the Savior’s cause.
3. This brings about the third condition, which sees men not as they are, but as they could be in Christ (2Co 5:16–17). How differently people appear to us when we look at them for what they might be.
4. The fourth and final transformation in the disciple is that of active ambassadorship (2Co 5:18–21), fulfilling the “*ministry of reconciliation*.” The message of the ambassador is simple, as that of the substitutionary death of Christ for us, and the imputation of His righteousness to all who believe (2Co 5:21).

Applications

1. It is clear that the Father is glorified both by inward transformation and by outward activities.
2. The absence of diligent action suggests a failure of inner growth and maturity.
3. Adopted sons are expected to be engaged in the Father’s business (Luk 2:49).
4. Faithful sons are active in bringing in the harvest of the Father’s field.

STUDY EIGHT:

The Bema-Seat of Christ will Reveal the Father's Reward to those Sons who are Diligent and Faithful

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” 2Co 5:10

Every child of God will give an account of his or her life. The issue will be what we have done with the privileges and resources we have been given. We will each answer for the work that was committed to us to do. The issue here is not sins—which have all been paid and will never be brought up again (Heb 10:17). Rather, it will be of good things in life, and whether I used those good things for self or for Christ. By “good things” here, I mean not only “*every spiritual blessing*” (Eph 1:3), but all good things of God’s provisions for us in life, including family, health, possessions, time, opportunities, etc. The word “*bad*” in the verse above is *phaulos*, and it connotes “worthless” or “good for nothing,” which is exactly what Christ said of salt that has lost its flavor (Mat 5:13). Salt, Jesus said, is good, until it fails to fulfill its intended purpose.

If I take the good gifts of God, and use them only for myself, I do not change their good quality. I simply make them “worthless” for the intended purpose. To the degree that we do this with the gifts of God, we produce “*wood, hay, straw*” which will feed a big bonfire by which those things will pass away (1Co 3:10–15; 1Jo 2:15–17). It is only when we “use the world, but don’t abuse it” (1Co 7:31) that our works will have eternal significance.

The Father's Honor (Joh 12:26; 2Co 4:17–18)

It is an ancient maxim of God that “*those who honor Me I will honor*” (1Sa 2:30). The very nature of God requires that faithfulness in service be rewarded. God will show honor to those who serve Him—both in this life and in eternity. Sometimes God demonstrates His pleasure in our lives by various kinds of blessings that we receive. Often, the evidence of God’s honor in this life is to share the sufferings of Christ (2Ti 2:12, 2Ti 3:12) in persecution.

But we are assured that, even when sufferings are our lot in life, they cannot compare to the “*eternal weight of glory*” (2Co 4:17) awaiting those who are faithful. History is filled with the record of men and women who lived lives of great peril, hardship, and afflictions. Only in Heaven will we see the honor those faithful servants will receive from their Father.

Partakers in Glory (Heb 3:12–14; Joh 13:8)

It is always good when we study the Bible to take note of conditional clauses. In the Hebrews text cited above, we are told that “*we have become partakers of Christ,*” which is then followed by the phrase, “*if we hold ... steadfast to the end.*” It is clear that some eternal privileges will be enjoyed by some—but not all—believers.

Jesus said to Peter in the Upper Room, “*If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me*” (Joh 13:8). He is not speaking of salvation, but of a “portion” (*meros*) including both service and

reward. It is this that the author of Hebrews has in mind. The “portion” is to be shared by those who are qualified to be “*partakers*” (*metochoi*). To be such, we must submit to the sanctifying work of Jesus Christ in our lives. We have been saved from the penalty of sin by faith in Christ. We must now be “saved” from the power and practice of sin, so that we will ultimately be “saved” from shame in the presence of Christ (1Co 3:15; 1Jo 2:28).

The Salvation of Those who Endure (Mat 24:13; 2Ti 2:10–13; Heb 2:3)

Many believers have been troubled by the statement, “*he who endures to the end shall be saved*” (Mat 24:13). The first logical question is: Saved from what? If Jesus is speaking here of eternal salvation, then we must conclude that it is by works—not faith. Only endurance to the end can assure of this salvation; therefore, no one could know if they “have it” until life is over. What a gloomy consideration!

But the context makes it clear that this is not what Jesus is talking about. Looking at Mat 24:4–14, we see many conditions of trial. Jesus warns that the great dangers to the believer are deception and fear (Mat 24:4, Mat 24:6). Because of these end-time calamities, “*the love of many will grow cold*” (Mat 24:12). This loss of “*first love*” (Rev 2:4) ultimately leads to being “*lukewarm*” (Rev 3:16). This condition will, in turn, result in loss of much eternal benefit and reward.

Remember that “salvation,” as used in the New Testament regarding those who believe, has three components:

1. saved from eternal condemnation,
2. saved from unfaithfulness in time, and
3. saved from loss of potential reward in eternity.

The first is accomplished in a moment of time, when we receive Jesus Christ as Savior. The second is the work of a lifetime, under the sanctifying work of the Spirit. I am convinced that no one will come through this without some loss. The third is the eternal ramifications of the second. How we, as Christians, live now will make a difference for all eternity. This is why the author of Hebrews urges us, “*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest*” (Heb 4:11), because it is possible to “*fall according to the same example of disobedience.*”

Inheriting the Promises (Heb 6:9–12)

The concepts developed in the previous section are reinforced again in the above passages. In Heb 6:12, the author warns his listeners, “*do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience [endurance] inherit the promises.*” The indication is that it is possible for them to fail and to forfeit potential eternal blessings.

It is worth taking note in Heb 6:10–12 that three words stand out: “*love ... hope ... faith.*” These spiritual “virtues” are found throughout the epistles as the full complement of faith (1Co 13:13; Rom 5:1, Rom 5:5; 1Th 1:3, 1Th 5:8; 1Pe 1:3, 1Pe 1:5, 1Pe 1:8). Regardless the order we find them in, these three qualities are indicative of a balanced spiritual life:

1. Faith looks back to the finished work of Christ on the cross.
2. Hope looks forward to the time we will enter into the presence of Jesus Christ.
3. Love looks at the world around us and sees how we can become an instrument in God's hands to bring others to saving faith in Christ.

The author speaks of these as being "*things that accompany salvation.*" The word "*accompany*" is simply "to have, to possess" (*echo*), but the genitive connotes an association between salvation and these qualities. This could be taken either that they accompany our initial salvation by faith in Christ, or that they are associated with that future deliverance from loss of reward (see Col 2:8, Col 2:18; Rev 3:11). This warning is sounded throughout the book of Hebrews, as the recipients were in danger of turning back to the shadows of Judaism in order to escape persecution.

Applications

1. Each of us should live our lives in light of the moment when we will stand before Christ and give an account of our life.
2. We often think of the kingdom to come, and of Christ reigning as King. But we should also remember that He will make the supreme offering up of that kingdom to the Father (1Co 15:24–28).
3. Ultimately, even our rewards will come from the Father, through Christ (Mat 6:1, Mat 6:6, Mat 6:18).
4. Let us learn to live as adult, adopted sons of the Most High God. And in the greatest times of trial, may we, like our Lord, cry out in total submission and obedience, "*Abba, Father!*"

Conclusion (Joh 13–17)

In the Upper Room discourse, Jesus speaks of the Father 49 times. Isn't it interesting that in His first recorded message (the Sermon on the Mount), He introduces the concept of God as heavenly Father of the believer, and in His last message (the Upper Room discourse), He challenges them (and us) with the potential of living in the Father's love and presence (Joh 14:21–23).

As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, the Father is often the overlooked member of the Godhead. I believe that, to the degree that we neglect His role as Father, we suffer much loss in what life as a child of God is intended to be.

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), farmer, soldier, politician, and religious reformer, became "Lord Protector" of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He led the "Covenanters," so named because they made a covenant to uphold and defend the Protestant faith against Roman Catholicism. Many Protestant leaders, known as "nonconformists," had been imprisoned, tortured, and killed by enforcers of the Catholic religion.

During this time, one of the Covenanters was Richard Cameron. He was killed while his father was being held in prison. As an added torture to the old man, his killers cut off his head and hands and presented them to his father, asking, *“Do you know these?”* The old man said, *“Do I know them? Yes, they are my son’s, my dear son’s. It is of the Lord! Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me nor mine, but hath made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.”*

Here was a man who knew what it meant to trust his heavenly Father even in the darkest hour!