

Forever Members of His Family

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Two services

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So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 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. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children-then heirs-heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.
Romans 8:12-17

Today I want to share with you the story of a young man named Ben Hooper. There have been a lot of stories written about him, but according to snopes.com they contradict each other in a number of ways. I limited myself to the things agreed upon in the various stories.

First, there was such a person. He was born an illegitimate son of an unwed woman named Sarah Wade. He was Ben Wade then. His father, a doctor named L. Hooper, was engaged to be married to another woman so he gave up the child. But as things turned out, his mother could not support Ben after her father died, and when he was eight years old, she placed him in an orphanage. This had quite an effect on Ben, for in an autobiography written later in life he is described as an unwanted child.

But his natural father's only other child died, and sixteen months after Ben arrived at the orphanage, Dr. Hooper adopted him, and he became Ben Hooper. Ben had a rough time of it because of his background, as he had to endure names, taunts, and bullying from other children. But somewhere along the way he found a church home. Somewhere along the way he found he had a heavenly Father and came to believe that he was a child of God. He was baptized when he was fifteen years old and reportedly remained a staunch Christian throughout his whole life. Ben Hooper went on to become a two-time Governor of the State of Tennessee.

Knowing you have a heavenly Father can change things. Knowing you have a heavenly Father can provide a person with a lot of help.

It is interesting to note how God the Father views us. Although he is the almighty God who has created us, he desires a much more personal relationship. I think we often miss this, and when we do, we are likely to miss out on many of the things our heavenly Father can do for us.

There are a number of passages that indicate this to us. Psalms 103:13 says, "As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." God does this by offering us a family relationship with Him. But how is that done?

Galatians 4:4-7 answers that: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

That brings us to our Epistle reading for today where Paul says, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by which we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ..."

So, think of the significance of this now. We have been adopted into the family of God! It would be well for us to consider what that means. What are the benefits of being a member of the family of God? Let me share my personal list with you today.

I guess that #1 on my list would be that for those who die in the faith, this is **forever**. Jesus is quoted in John 6:40, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone that looks on the Son and believes in him, should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." On earth, families slowly drift apart and eventually are separated by death. But the family of God is promised that they will live **forever!**

I would say that #2 on my list is that we have been delivered from the bondage of sin. Because of Christ's death on the cross, we are **forgiven** of all our sins and delivered from eternal judgment. There is a Christian song that goes like this: "I'm so glad I'm part of the family of God; washed in the fountain, cleansed by his blood. Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod. I'm so glad we're a family-a family of God." That means we have a lot of brothers and sisters, doesn't it?

For #3, I would have to say that when a person has a saving faith in Christ they are likely to receive a special provision of God's **blessings**. A Christian is blessed when he shows his love or appreciation for God by serving him. This can, of course, be done in many ways. In my own case, being a convert to the Christian faith, I have long had a concern for the plight of those who do not know Christ. I try to sow the Word of God in as many ways as possible. Some believe, and some don't. That's the work of the Holy Spirit. But through it all, I have to say that I have been richly blessed.

Finally, I conclude my list today with #4. A great benefit that comes with being a child of God is experiencing the **presence** of God. I have experienced this. I always have someone a lot greater than me to whom I can talk. I take the words of God the Father personally as he is quoted in Isaiah 41, "I have chosen you and not cast you off; fear not, for I am with you." (Isaiah 41:9b) Jesus once said much the same thing, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

But we also need to note here that many Christians fail to receive all the benefits they could have as a child of God. Some of them live as rebels rather than as children of God. They don't take God or their sins seriously. Thus, this morning we should also remember Paul's warning in Romans 8:13, "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." He also states something else that's very important: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." (verse 14)

Never forget this: God wants his family to grow. We have a responsibility to seek the lost. It is estimated that 80-90% of the world's population is lost. They don't know that Jesus is the way to heaven. The Lord seeks to mobilize his family to go out in the mission field and find them. It may be a short trip. It may be your neighbor next door or some person who has moved in down the street. We have been equipped with a message that can change people's lives. We have been given a message which can change where a person will spend eternity. What could be more important than that? I'd like to ask you today to ask the Lord to guide you to people with whom you can share the message. It is a joy, both to God and to us, to see God's family grow. Amen.