

Last week we encountered a bit of a scary thought, but something I suspect we already knew to be true – not everyone we find in a church, is actually a Christian. *Going to church doesn't mean you're a Christian any more than living in a garage means you're a motor car...*

And it's so much easier for us to understand this, when we see the contrasts of opposites that Paul draws for us. And the contrast that he showed us last week, was between those who walk according to the Spirit, as opposed to those who walk according to the flesh.

To those who walk according to the Spirit, well the things of God, are life and peace... but when the mind is set on the flesh, it's hostile to God, and the things of God (to them) are dead – **they** are spiritually dead...

So, for example:

- A mind that is set on the Spirit, will find worship alive and invigorating, but a mind that's set on the flesh, will find it boring and dead, and they'll just wish that it would come to an end, already.
- When a person's mind is set on the Spirit, they will find that when they read the Bible, it comes alive to them – they delight in the revelation of peace and truth and love, and it fills them with a glorious hope!... But a mind set on the flesh can read those very same words, and find them to be lifeless and irrelevant, or they might even find them offensive, and they make them angry...
- The mind set on the Spirit, will love to hear the Gospel being preached. But when a person's mind is set on the flesh, they'll find a 10 minute sermon puts them to sleep,

and their minds will wander in under 2 minutes of prayer...

Just because, at some level, a person believes in God, that doesn't mean they're filled with the Spirit, and it certainly doesn't mean they're walking by the Spirit.

And yet, that is the defining mark of being a Christian – of being saved – to be filled with the Spirit of Christ. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to Jesus... That's the simple, cutting truth...

And if last week you were left feeling,
“I'm not sure that I **am** filled with Christ” - “**I'm not** walking in the way of the Spirit, and my mind is **so** set on things of the flesh”...

If you were left feeling that –... well if you haven't done so already, you need to do some serious soul-searching, and surrender – not only your life – but surrender your mind, to Christ Jesus.... And ask Him, “Lord, take control of my life. Fill me with your Spirit, and Christ, come alive in me”...

But whatever you do, **don't** give up, and **don't** despair... Because if you're feeling these things, well this is a sure and certain sign, that the Holy Spirit is doing a work in you – He is drawing you to God... In fact, Jesus said “**No** one can come to me, **unless** the Father draws Him”¹. This is something that we **all** have to experience – **God** drawing us to Himself... And it's often accompanied by this feeling of inadequacy – “I'm not yet right with God” – “There's something missing” – “My relationship with God isn't what it should be”... And this is the Holy Spirit, letting you know that He wants to do a

work in you, and draw you deeper in your relationship with your Heavenly Father.

Some of us just dip our toe in the water, and paddle around the edges with God... Where as He wants us to dive in – immerse ourself in Christ – to be filled with Christ. That’s where He’s wanting to take you...

So, **don’t** give up. **Know**, that **this** is God, doing His wonderful redemption work in you. Your part, is to set your mind on the Spirit. And work **with** Him – don’t work against Him.

Now, **having** said that, this contrast, of walking according to the Spirit (as opposed to walking according to the flesh) – well, it’s not **intended** as something to make us question whether we’re saved or not (although it may have that effect)...

It’s purpose, is actually quite the opposite. It’s purpose, is to give to those who **are** Christians, an unshakable assurance, that Christ **is** in our hearts – it’s an unshakable assurance that God loves us, and He’s not going to desert us, and He’s going to carry us through, to when we’ll actually be raised from the dead, and be present with Him in His glory.

The fact that Christ **is** in our hearts, is the sign of sonship... We often tend to think about **our** commitment – that **we** make to God... Well, what about the commitment that our God makes to **us**??? – The commitment of adoption. Can you think of any **greater** commitment?

*Imagine, if you were to adopt a child... At the point of adoption, that child becomes **your** child... It's not something you can take back. And they don't come with a warranty either. If they get sick or disabled – they're still your child, and your responsibility – you've made that commitment.*

And our Heavenly Father has made that commitment to us. When we give our hearts and lives to Jesus – when we repent of our sin, and convert to Christ, our Heavenly Father adopts us as His sons. Have you ever thought of **that** commitment that God is making to us? While we are willing to be His children, He's committing to be our Heavenly Father.

V15 says: you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"

The original New Testament scrolls, were written in Greek, because Greek was the most universal written language of the day... Jesus didn't speak Greek. Jesus spoke a regional dialect, called "Aramaic" – it was a sister language to "Hebrew"... And a very few times in the New Testament, the writers have been inspired by God, to include the Aramaic word. And that's what we have here – "Abba"... It would be one of the first words that a little baby would learn "Abba" "Dadda".

By the time Jesus was born, the Scribes were so terrified of God's name, they wouldn't even use it. God's name – "YHWH" or "Jehovah" (if you want the Germanised, mixed up version), was something they would never pronounce from their lips – just in case they dishonoured His name in some way.

And even our English versions of the Bible today, are hang-overs from that... In your Old Testament, wherever the word “the LORD” is written in all capitals, in the Hebrew, the word is not “the LORD” at all – the word is God’s name – YHWH... And if you want to begin having a deeper, more personal experience with God, as you read your Old Testament, why don’t you do what we’ve been doing at the Men’s Bible Study??? Wherever you see the word “the LORD” or “GOD” written in all capitals, why don’t you try saying the name that God has revealed to us in the Scriptures “YHWH”....

So, rather than using God’s name, the scribes would refer to Him as The LORD, or GOD, because they were so terrified of using His Name incorrectly... But then along came Jesus. And one day, Jesus' disciples said “Can you teach us to pray?” And how did he start? You pray like this: “Our Father...” In the Aramaic that Jesus was speaking, he probably said “Abba”....

What a revolution. No wonder the religious leaders wanted to crucify Him. They were too scared to even use God’s personal Name, and Jesus said “You can call Him “Daddy””.

So, we’ve been adopted as God’s sons. Our relationship with Him is such that **we** can call Him “Abba” “Daddy”... *Now, I hope you don’t think of “Waterloo” every time hear the word “Abba”. The Super-Swedes didn’t name their band with any religious reason – it’s an acronym made up from their names: Agnetha, Björn, Benny and Anni-Fridⁱⁱ. So, that’s not the ABBA we’re praying to...*

So, let's come back to walking in the Spirit: We walk in the Spirit, because we want to walk in the footsteps of Abba. We want to walk in the footsteps of our loving Heavenly Father – it's as simple as that...

V14 says: ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. ¹⁵ 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!"

Now, sometimes there seems to be a bit of a discrepancy in the New Testament... As Christians, should we consider ourselves slaves to Jesus, or not?

- Paul **often** referred to himself as a slave. In fact, even when he began this letter to the Romans 1:1, he introduces Himself: **Paul. Slave of Jesus Christ...**
- In Chapter 6, he tells us we **were** slaves to sin, but now we've become slaves to righteousness.
- But **Jesus** said that He doesn't call **his** disciples "slaves", because slaves don't know their master's business, and He had revealed His business – He had revealed His purpose to His disciples.
- And now Paul is saying we didn't receive a **spirit of slavery to fall back into fear**

And so sometimes, it seems as if we **should** consider ourselves slaves to Christ, and yet other times not... What's it getting at here?

I believe the difference is, “the bondage of slavery” – so that it’s something to do with fear – to be beaten and whipped, and held captive as slaves, and being **forced** to do it – we’re not slaves to Christ in that way. We actually **choose** to be His slaves. And I believe, that V14 & 15 help us to understand what this looks like.

*There **once** was a time – things are different now (generally), but there **once** was a time, when sons would stay home, and work in their Father’s business, and you could almost say they were slaves. They didn’t work for a wage. They didn’t accrue holidays or Long Service Leave. They weren’t accumulating superannuation or storing up a nest-egg of their own...*

Their father would provide what they needed to live on. And when they got married, he’d provide them with accommodation... And yet they would quite happily work (like slaves) in their father’s business. Why would they do that???

I’ll tell you why – it’s because they were sons – they were heirs. Everything the Father had, would one day be theirs. And so they joyfully worked as slaves on the farm (or in the family business). They would work longer hours than those who were getting paid to do it. And they would take more care in the business than those who were getting paid to do it.

*No matter how menial the task – if they saw that something needed doing, it wouldn’t be left undone... Because the Father’s business was **their** business, and everything the Father had, would one day be theirs... Because they were heirs...*

Not so common any more... Probably for 2 reasons – Sons want to have independence.. And parents want to retire and relax, and the family business often gets in the way of that...

And so, we **choose** to be slaves of Christ. We're not in the bondage of slavery... Walking in the Spirit, is willing walking in the Father's footsteps, because the Father's business is our business... We are heirs... We are joint heirs with the Son, and what is Christ going to inherit? Everything... The inheritance is looking pretty good, isn't it?

So, we're not unwilling slaves. And **nor** are we afraid of God... And here we might see another discrepancy. In the Bible, we're **often** told to fear God. It is **right** to fear God... But here we're being told, that because we are adopted as children of God, we shouldn't be afraid – it's not to do with fear...

When I was in primary school (maybe grade 5 or 6)... We got a new school principal – Mr Buckley. And Mr Buckley lived right next door to the school, in the principal's residence. And his twin children (Andrew and Christine, I think were their names), were in my grade at School. And Andrew was in my class, and he was one of my friends.

Now, this was in the days, where students used to fear the Principal. We weren't scared of him, unless we had done something wrong. If you had done something wrong, and were sent up to the office, you were terrified, because you were probably going to get 3 or 4 of his best – cane across the palm of the hand... (I never got the cane, by the way, I was a good boy)...

But all students (whether good or bad), would fear the principal. We had a very healthy respect for him...

*We **so** feared him, that we would never play a ball game, anywhere near his house. Because if the ball ended up on the other side of the school fence (in Mr Buckley's back yard), nobody was going to go over there and get it – we wouldn't dare – and we certainly wouldn't want to break one of his windows... In **that** regard, it had gone beyond being a healthy fear – we were scared...*

But one day, I received an invitation (to a birthday party). The principal's son (Andrew) had invited me to a party, and guess where it was going to be? It was held in the same place that I was afraid to go... But it was OK, you see, because I was with the son. I wasn't afraid – I still feared Mr Buckley – I had a very healthy respect for him... But I wasn't terrified of going to Mr Buckley's house any more, because I was with his son...

We are only heirs – we are only adopted as God's sons, because of **His** son. We are **in** Christ, and **because** we are in Christ, we are heirs – we ourselves are adopted as God's sons. We are heirs of **God** and fellow heirs with **Christ**...

And because we are in Christ, we are not only with Him in the blessings – we're with Christ in the sufferings too...

V16 & 17 ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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.

Walking by the Spirit, doesn't mean we're not going to suffer.

You know, some people get the idea that if everything's going wrong for us, that must mean we're not in God's will... But the fact of the matter is: One of the marks of being a Christian, is suffering.

Children of God, **will** be persecuted for their faith – I can promise you that... And that's completely in line with what Jesus said. He said “^{John 15:18} **If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you....**”

You know, often in our prayers, we thank God that we're **not** suffering – we thank God that we're **not** being persecuted... But I want you to know this: “when we're persecuted because of the name of Jesus, **we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**”

Religionnews.com says this:

With North Korea leading the way and Islamic extremism rapidly expanding, 2015 was the “worst year in modern history for Christian persecution,” according to a group tracking this issue.

Iraq is in second place on Open Doors' 2016 World Watch List, a ranking of the top 50 most dangerous places in the world to be a Christian.

It's the first of 35 countries on the list where Islamic extremism "has risen to a level akin to ethnic cleansing," said the report, released Wednesday (Jan. 13).

Sometimes I go to the Open Doors website, to get a dose of reality, of what it's like to be a Christian in most of the world... And to know what to pray for – so we can pray for persecuted Christians for strength.

This was in the Open Doors news this week:

More than 1,000 have been killed by Islamist militants in eastern DRC [Democratic Republic of Congo] since October 2014, according to a local civil society organisation.

A relatively unknown militant group has intensified attacks in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), raising fears of the emergence of a new jihadist organisation in central Africa. For years now, one of various rebel groups operating there, the Islamist Allied Democratic Forces-National Association for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU), has been trying to uproot Christians from the north-east area of DRC through attacks, rape, looting, kidnap and murder - on an almost weekly basis.

At least 36 people were killed in the latest attack on Saturday night (13 Aug.) in the village of Rwangoma, near Beni, the major town in the region. ... [there have been] reports of as many as 50 dead.ⁱⁱⁱ

Here's another story:

Early in 2015, a French satirical magazine (Charlie Hebdo) published a controversial cartoon, which triggered an attack on their office in Paris, France, where 11 people were killed. As two million gathered in Paris in a peaceful show of national unity, the event set off a ripple effect across the Muslim world, including in Niger where rioters lashed out at the closest thing they associated with the West – the church. Rioters killed three Christians, burned and looted 76 churches and Christian institutions and 50 Christian homes. Open Doors field workers met with and supported many who were effected.^{iv}

.....

Pastor Cappo's story: Not only was Pastor Cappo's home burned to the ground, but his church also. He explained the effect on his congregation. "Our members have been so traumatised... They are so scared of coming to church... Their assumption is that these people could return to attack them. The number of people attending service has been reduced by half."

Yet the Lord has also used the crisis to strengthen others, as Cappo said, "It is exciting to see some members making a stronger commitment to follow Jesus... some have boldly declared that it is now that their Christianity has begun."

Many Muslims in Niger did not agree with the attacks on Christians and are ashamed at what their brothers have done. Some tried to douse the flames started by other Muslims. Some took fleeing Christians into their midst.

“My neighbour who used to behave harshly towards us became very sober and sympathetic. He came and pleaded with me not to be annoyed with him, since those who committed these acts were not [true] Muslims... A few days later he came to my house again with his wife to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. Who would have expected that out of this bad situation our people would be so bold to come out to receive the good life,” exclaimed Cappo.

When we pray, instead of praying, “Thank you Lord that we can meet here in freedom – thank you that we’re not persecuted”, wouldn’t it be better to pray for those who are??? Wouldn’t it be better to pray, “Lord, give strength to those who meet today, in Your Name, at the risk of their lives.” “May they be witnesses for you. May they never deny you. And may they be filled with your Spirit for strength and love.” Wouldn’t that be a better prayer?

Christians are suffering every day for their faith. Why? Why would they go through it? What did that pastor mean, when he said *“It is exciting to see some members making a stronger commitment to follow Jesus... some have boldly declared that it is now that their Christianity has begun.”*????

When we suffer for Christ, we are suffering **with** Christ. And when we suffer with Christ, there is probably no greater assurance, that we will be glorified in Christ...

Our present sufferings, are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

And we're going to be talking more about that Glory, next week.

In Christ, we are children of God... And our relationship with God is such that we can cry out to Him "Abba, Father" "Daddy"... And as His adopted children, we are heirs to the Father – joint heirs with the Son...

Being in Christ, is accompanied with suffering now. And our present reality, might seem like a long time, and it might seem like a hard time... But it's very short, because as sons of God, we inherit eternity... And it's not an eternity of troubles and hardships – It's a glorious inheritance – more wonderful than we can imagine...

And we can know for sure, that we're not going to be left out, because Christ is in us, and because Christ is in us, we walk by the Spirit.

Amen.

ⁱ John 6:44

ⁱⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ABBA>

ⁱⁱⁱ www.opendoors.org

^{iv} <https://opendoorsblog.org/2016/08/16/remember-charlie-hebdo-churches-burnt-in-response-riots-in-niger/>