

## Romans 8:14

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*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

It is here, at this point in our establishment doctrine in Romans, that we are first introduced to our identity as *sons of God*. This phrase, *sons of God*, carries with it much more than we typically understand it to mean in 21st century western culture. We understand this phrase simply to mean that we're *children* of God. But if scripture wanted to say *children of God*, then that's what it would say, and in fact that is *exactly* what it's going to say in just a few more verses.

The problem is that in our culture, to be a *son* often has little to no meaning outside of being someone's male child. *Son*, in this context, while it does refer to a child, isn't referring to a young child, but to a mature, adult offspring who is to be the heir of the family. That was the custom in ancient cultures—that the eldest son would, at a certain time in life, become the heir of the family property, business, et cetera... and that they would be responsible for running and maintaining these things.

Now of course, the Greek word translated as *son* here, *huios*, can have other meanings outside of this, but for reasons we will see in time, it is evident that it is specifically *this sense* in which the word is meant to be understood in Romans 8. There are other words that *can be* and *are* in fact translated as *son*, and while these all can have an overlap in meaning, there is a distinct connotation to this particular word that the others don't carry.

This phrase, *son of God*, carries within it the idea of *liberty* and of *authority*—of *freedom*, and yet therefore also *responsibility*. This phrase carries within it the concept of *identity*, for *the son* receives *identity* from *his father*. If we are *sons of God*, then we have received an identity from God Himself, and we are therefore to bear His image, His character, His *likeness*—and *that* is the very meaning of the English word *godliness*. It is to bear *God's likeness*, a likeness that was, in many respects, lost back in the garden. Since this concept, of our being *sons*, is directly correlated to *identity*, it is fitting that we see this concept arise only *after* we have learned of our identity in Christ, which is the very basis of our sanctification to begin with.

As we briefly touched on in the last lesson, sanctification itself has three components, and all three of them relate to our identity: we were made *dead to sin*, not just in a judicial sense, but in the very nature of our inner man; we were made *alive unto God* by that spiritual union we have with the life of Christ Himself, whereby we share in Christ's righteousness; and now, here we see we therefore have a *status* before God, we have a relational identity before God—we are *sons of God*. Similar to how our atonement in terms of our legal justification before God is the result of the propitiating work of Christ, and the imputation of His righteousness, this *status* as *sons of God* is only possible because of all of the previous aspects of our salvation that we've looked at *that are already in place*. Without forgiveness of sins and Christ's righteousness imputed to your account, you could not be considered a son of God. Without being made dead to sin in the inner man, and alive unto God by the life of Christ in us, we could not carry out the practical responsibilities that a son of God is to carry out. All of those mechanical elements of the gospel must be in place for this status before God to be a reality, both positionally and practically.

Another thing for us to understand up front is that what's in view here with this phrase, *sons of God*, is *not* gender, but again, *status*. Of course, historically it was often the case that the responsibility of the family estate or practice would be conferred upon the biological male offspring, and so "son" is the word used so as to convey this particular meaning, but what is available here is available to *all*, regardless of physical distinctions. Scripture in fact will later use the phrase *sons and daughters*, and so we cannot think of this phrase as its used here in Romans 8:14 as if somehow communicating something misogynistic, something that is prejudiced against women, but rather understand that scripture, rather than say *sons and daughters* every time, for the sake of simplicity perhaps, and because of the historical understanding of the role of the biological son in the family, uses the word *sons* to denote this particular concept, and the body of doctrine that surrounds it. This concept, of being sons, is not something that even pertains to biological sex at all, but actually pertains to a body of doctrine that relates to our identity and status as the offspring of God, and the responsibilities that this entails.

A *son* in this context is vested with certain rights. The way this phrase is often understood is as if this is simply speaking of us being *children of God*, which of course is true, and which is going to be addressed in some of the following verses. But this doctrine exceeds our simply being made children of God. That language is used as well, and so we must understand that we are in fact God's children, now that we are in Christ; but to be God's child can be understood to the exclusion of being a *son* in the sense of what's to be communicated here—you can understand you are God's child without understanding the full semantic range of what it means to be a son, but you cannot understand what it is to be a son without understanding that you are God's child. To be a *son* means more than just being God's child.

The first thing I want us to get firmly rooted in our thinking is that being a son of God is a *status*, and it is one you are automatically given as a result of the things you received as a part of your

salvation—as a part of your justified and sanctified position in Christ—and it is a status that surpasses the notion of our being mere children.

However, as being a *son* is the third component of our *sanctification*, we need to understand something, and I think the best way for us to understand it by us asking ourselves a few questions:

1. When you were made *dead to sin*, did that mean that you would automatically defeat sin patterns in your life? No it didn't.
2. When you were made *alive unto God*, did that mean you would automatically walk in the righteousness of Jesus's resurrection life? No it didn't.

And so, although both of these things were true for us spiritually the moment we trusted the gospel, they did not immediately become practical realities in our lives. The same is true for our being *sons*. We have received the spiritual blessing and benefit and status of being *sons* the very moment we trusted the gospel, but to live this identity out practically is something else altogether. Our status as sons is immediate, eternal, unchanging, not dependent upon us whatsoever, and yet our lives as sons *practically* is something that depends on our sanctified lives in Christ being fully functional. It therefore requires that we have been through the doctrine of the first two components of sanctification and have them in working order—that is, that our faith has been brought into full obedience to the truth, and that we have been made dead to sin so that *we can* live unto God.

This is an important distinction to make, because this verse states those who are led of the Spirit—these are the sons of God.

This seems to indicate that only those who are led by the Spirit are sons of God. But we know by now that not all believers are going to walk after the Spirit or be led by the Spirit, some are going to walk after the flesh. Are we to understand from this verse that not all believers are sons of God? Only those who walk after the Spirit? Now, what if you walk after the Spirit for a time, and then have a period where you falter, where you walk after the flesh? Are you not a son of God in those moments? You see, this makes the status something that is liable to change, but the status is rooted in *identity*, and your identity is given as a free gift the moment you trust the gospel.

Even though we have been sanctified, that sanctification is not always realized in these present bodies. The outworking of our sanctification is not automatic, it is dependent on us walking after the Spirit. This issue of our being sons of God is no different, in that it is a part of who we are in our sanctified standing before God, but our realization of that identity in this life is something dependent on our being led by the Spirit.

What is directly in view with this verse is not our positional standing however, which should be no surprise, since that has not been the subject for some two and a half chapters.

The truth of our positional standing as sons may not be immediately clear upon studying this verse alone. In fact, to read Romans 8:14 in isolation could be misleading, because the natural deduction we would make from this single verse is that if you are not led by the Spirit, you are not a son of God. And so we need to consider it alongside verse 15:

### **Romans 8:14-15**

*14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

*15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

Verse 15 explains for us the nature of this “leading of the Spirit,” that we have received the Spirit and therefore everything He brings to the table, including His intent to carry out certain aspects of His ministry; and while this lesson isn't going to allow an exposition of verse 15, what we need to understand about it is that all members of the Body of Christ have already received *the Spirit of adoption*.

It is *that aspect* of the Spirit's ministry that is in view in verse 14 with our status as sons. There is a correlation between our status as sons and the Spirit of adoption, of which *we've all received*. But if we understand this verse in light of *our positional standing*, then this limits those who are *sons of God* to those who are *walking after the Spirit*, making our standing something dependent upon us. This is not the case. This verse is not dealing with our standing, but with our walk. And yet verse 15 makes it clear by introducing us to the truth that *we've all already received* the Spirit of adoption that our status as sons of God is also a positional reality for us.

There is a definitive reason why the Holy Ghost employed the phrase *walking after the Spirit* in verses 1 through 13, and yet here in verse 14, it switches to those who are *led by the Spirit*. Is there necessarily always a difference between *following after* and *being led* by someone? Not necessarily. From our perspective, we are *walking after*. And yet from the Spirit's perspective, He is leading us on.

But I think this change in phraseology is not so much about semantics as about being a clue for us to see this transition—that verses 14 and 15 are now explaining yet another aspect of the

Spirit's ministry that He desires to perform in us, the resources of which are already available to us, and were made available the moment we believed. The switch, from *walking after the Spirit* to being *led of the Spirit* is not an accident. There is something now very specific that is going to begin to be communicated, starting here in verse 14.

An alternative view often proposed to this is that, in actuality, we have been led by the Spirit since the moment we heard and trusted the gospel; and in a general sense that is true, and I'm not going to argue against that point, if that is how one chooses to view it. However, I tend to think that what is being indicated in verse 14 is pointing us toward something about our identity in Christ that is made known in verse 15, something relating to a specific aspect of the Holy Ghost's ministry that He desires to lead us through, and which, just like the other components of our sanctification, is not automatic practically. Our being functional sons of God depends on us walking after the Spirit and being led by the Spirit.

We see that this aspect of our identity as *sons* was given to us as a free gift of grace the moment we believed clearly when we consider a parallel passage that speaks to this very thing in Galatians chapter 4:

#### **Galatians 4:1-7**

*1 Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all;*

*2 But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.*

*3 Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world:*

*4 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,*

*5 To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

*6 And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.*

*7 Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

The Galatians, under pressure from a renegade faction of the circumcision, had succumbed to legalism, and were seeking to be further perfected by the Law. They had to some extent abandoned the doctrine committed to them by Paul—they had received *another gospel*—and rather than walking by faith, they were walking in the flesh, attempting to add something to their standing by their works. Were they walking after the Spirit or being led by the Spirit? They were not. Were they walking as sons? No they weren't—they had gotten entangled again in a yoke of bondage, in the Law. And yet Paul here in no uncertain terms affirms their identity as sons.

Verse 6 says, *and because ye are sons*. Their failure to hold fast to the doctrine, to walk by faith, did not change their status before God.

And so I want us to understand this as we are considering this verse in Romans 8. However you choose to deal with the language of Romans 8:14, the one thing we need to understand with certainty is that all who have trusted in the finished work of Jesus Christ have been given a legal status and identity as sons. We are all *sons of God* in the positional sense. And what I mean is that we all have that status before God, we all have that position in our standing before God because of our *identity*. But it would be easy to mistake Romans 8:14 to mean that only those who are led of the Spirit are sons of God, because that *is* in fact what the verse says—*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God*—because what is in view here is not our *position*, but our *practice*; not our *standing*, but our *state*, and that *is* conditional, and it's conditioned upon one thing—us walking after and being led of the Spirit.

We have seen this as we've gone through Romans, that there is a series of things the Spirit of God is doing within us as we move through the doctrine, ministries He desires to perform within us. In Romans chapter 5 we see the love of God being poured out in our hearts as a result of our being justified while yet sinners, so that the selfless love of God would be formed within us, that we would in turn be able to minister it to others. We see the Spirit baptized us into Christ, and by minding those truths, by allowing the Spirit of God in the word of God to dwell in us, we are able to walk in freedom from sin, and are able to have these present mortal bodies quickened, or brought to fulness of function. Well now we are seeing there is yet another ministry the Spirit wants to perform in us, and it is in relation to this status as sons.

But what is in view in this passage is something very particular. This verse, Romans 8:14, is the first open declaration of our status as sons, but it is declared only at this point of our edification. It was not declared at any time prior. Why?

Let me frame this issue with another question: was Jesus always God's son? Of course He was. And yet, the Father did not pronounce Him publicly as Son until a certain point. And in fact, there are three specific events the scripture discloses to us in which the Father pronounces Jesus Christ as His Son.

The first one is in Matthew chapter 3, at Jesus's water baptism:

**Matthew 3:13-17**

**13** *Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him.*

**14** *But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?*

*15 And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him.*

*16 And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him:*

*17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*

It was here that God the Father first publicly and audibly declares Jesus to be His Son, and it is only after this event that Jesus enters into temptation with the devil and His subsequent ministry.

The second public declaration by the Father of Jesus's identity as His Son is made in Matthew 17:

**Matthew 17:1-8**

*1 And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,*

*2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*

*3 And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.*

*4 Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.*

*5 While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.*

*6 And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid.*

*7 And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid.*

*8 And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only.*

The third pronouncement by God the Father of Jesus's divine identity as His Son was not pronounced audibly from heaven as the first two, and that is because at this point, there would be no sign more signs from the Father and from Jesus Himself except one: His resurrection from the dead. Of course there would be the post-resurrection ministry of the Holy Ghost *through the apostles* in the early portion of the book of Acts. But as far as signs from God the Father and God the Son in Israel's prophetic, covenant program, the last one was to be Christ's resurrection. That is another way in which we know that what began with Paul was something

distinct—because Christ Himself gave a sign to unbelieving *Saul of Tarsus*—something He said to the unbelieving element of Israel that *He would not do*. This is similar to Christ telling unbelieving Israel in Matthew 23:39 that they would not see Him again until they said “blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord,” essentially confessing Jesus’s identity as Messiah. That is why Jesus only appeared to *believers* after His resurrection. And yet again, He appeared to *unbelieving, unworthy* Saul of Tarsus, and made him an apostle. But I digress.

This third pronouncement by God the Father is actually made at Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. Consider what Paul says in Acts chapter 13:

**Acts 13:32-35**

**32** *And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,*

**33** *God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*

**34** *And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.*

**35** *Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*

Paul here, as he says, is quoting from the second Psalm, in which God the Father pronounces Jesus His Son at His resurrection from the dead. And in fact we saw this back in Romans chapter 1:

**Romans 1:3-4**

**3** *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;*

**4** *And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead...*

We see this third declaration is made, not by an audible voice from heaven, but by the resurrection from the dead itself, as God’s legal proof of Jesus’s sinless perfection and therefore identity, and since there was no audible voice, God spoke it in His word for us to know.

I find it interesting that there are 3 of these declarations, and that each of these seem to have some parallel to the steps found in our edification:

Jesus was declared the Son at His water baptism; we are baptized into Christ spiritually the moment we believe and are identified with Him, united to Him, and are justified, sanctified, and made a part of all of the benefits that Christ obtained for us spiritually, including an identity as sons; *Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?* (Rom. 6:3); *For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.* (1 Cor. 12:13).

Jesus was declared the Son at His transfiguration; we are “transfigured” into His image as we learn of our identity and sanctified life in Him—But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Cor. 3:18).

Jesus was declared the Son when He was baptized into death itself and overcame, and rose unto eternal life; *We which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh* (2 Cor. 4:11-12).

And so, I don’t want to be dogmatic about this, but I find it interesting that all three of these principles found in our edification doctrine have parallels to Jesus’s three proclamations as the Son of the Father. And so I’ll leave that for your consideration.

Just as Jesus was always God’s Son, it was only at certain times, with certain events, Jesus having fulfilled *certain things*, that God openly declares Him to be His Son. Such is the case with us in our salvation—we are sons the moment we believe, and are *always* sons, but it is only as we progress in the doctrine, and that doctrine begins to work in us, that we actually demonstrate that identity as sons. Think about it—why didn’t God just declare Jesus as His Son the moment He was born? Of course, it was made known to Mary and Joseph the Divine nature of Jesus’s origins and birth, but there was no open declaration from the Father. So why wasn’t there?

It is because of the things we began to talk about several lessons ago—that Jesus had to accomplish certain things as a man in reliance on the Father. Jesus had to undergo *a process*. And it was only at certain milestones within this process that He was declared to be God’s Son *as a man*, in His humanity.

What we are beginning to be introduced to here in Romans 8:14 is a very specific aspect of the Spirit’s ministry, one that has in view our being “led of the Spirit” in order to take us on to perfection. And so, the Spirit is leading us—but where is He leading us to? It will take us some time, but we will in this chapter unpack all of this.

One thing we need to understand is that Jesus fully identified with us. He came and lived as we live, and offered Himself up, and became sin for us on the cross. He identified with us. And so the question now is, will we identify with Him?

Now, of course, we can't identify with Him in His *deity*. We are not and will never be God. Neither will we ever be vested with those incommunicable attributes that God possesses that make Him eternally separate and unique from His creation. But God became man and dwelt among man. And as a man went through something that God the Father appointed Him to in His humanity. It is this particular thing that He is waiting to see if we will identify with.

This phrase that we have encountered here in Romans 8:14, *led of the Spirit*, has suffered much the same fate in modern Christianity as the phrase *walking after the Spirit*, which we looked at earlier in this chapter. We saw how, in that specific case, *walking after the Spirit* was referring us to *minding* the things that the Spirit performed in us spiritually, in our inner man, in our identity, when we believed. It was not referring to some mystical, unknowable, unverifiable, subjective experience subject to private interpretation and deception, but to cold hard facts given to us by God about what He already did, written down for all to see and understand. And so we should expect this phrase to also then refer to something tangible, knowable, verifiable, objective. Something communicated to us in scripture.

This specific phrase, *led of the Spirit*, in that exact form, only shows up in Paul's epistles and in Luke 4:1:

#### **Luke 4:1-2**

*1 And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,*

*2 Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered.*

There *is* one other instance that is close, and for all practical purposes is the same, and that instance is found in Matthew chapter 4:

#### **Matthew 4:1**

*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

Now, here the exact wording is "led *up* of the Spirit," which may be a reference to *altitude*, similar to when it is written that one goes "up" to Jerusalem, even if they were geographically north of Jerusalem, as it is a reference to the altitude, not the four points of the compass. But as I said,

for all practical purposes, this is the same phrase as we see here in Romans 8:14, and we know that because Luke 4:1 is an account of the same event.

So what happened immediately after Jesus' water baptism? God openly declares Him to be His Son. And what happened immediately after that? He was *led by the spirit* into the wilderness *to be tempted of the devil*.

And so I want us to think about this and the implications it carries. Jesus was declared to be God's Son, and then is led by the Spirit to be tempted. He fasted, and hungered, and was approached with an illegitimate offer for the kingdoms of the world from Satan Himself. This was not a pleasant experience—it was a *trial*.

And yet, when we hear this language being used today, it's never in reference to being led into trials, or suffering... but that is how it is meant to be understood. Paul uses *this specific phrase* here in Romans 8:14, and it only ever shows up in the entire bible in this one instance where Jesus Himself is going to be tempted by Satan. Do you think this is by accident, or is it by design? I believe it's by design, in fact, I believe the entire bible is by design, and that this is how it interprets itself. If God only ever used this phrase one other time and it was in reference to something specific, then that's how He wants us to think about it.

And so, Jesus was always God's Son, and yet He was only openly declared to be so after His baptism and *was then* led by the Spirit, as a Son, into the wilderness *to be tempted*. The Spirit is also trying to lead us somewhere. Is a servant above His Master? To bring this back to our earlier discussion, Jesus was declared a son and then led by the Spirit. This is the way we are to understand Romans 8:14. We have been declared something—sons—and now, all who are sons, which is all who have trusted the gospel, the Spirit wants to lead onward.

Now, we've looked at several things in this lesson, but haven't actually arrived where it is we need to go. All I wanted to do today was for us to get some background information, because it's going to be necessary for us later. There's actually still quite a bit to unpack in this verse. And so, without going any further, we'll conclude this lesson.

