

ADOPTION—THE SPIRIT AND THE CRY NO. 1435

A SERMON
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*“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.”
Galatians 4:6.*

WE do not find the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity set forth in Scripture in formal terms, such as those which are employed in the Athanasian Creed, but the truth is continually taken for granted, as if it were a fact well known in the church of God. If not laid down very often, in so many words, it is everywhere held in solution, and it is mentioned incidentally in connection with other truths in a way which renders it quite as distinct as if it were expressed in a set formula. In many passages it is brought before us so prominently that we must be willfully blind if we do not note it. In the present chapter, for instance, we have distinct mention of each of the three divine Persons. “God,” that is the Father, “sent forth the Spirit,” that is the Holy Spirit and He is here called, “the Spirit of His Son.” Nor have we the names alone, for each sacred person is mentioned as acting in the work of our salvation. Look at the fourth verse, “God sent forth His Son.” Then note the fifth verse, which speaks of the Son as *redeeming* them that were under the law, and then the text itself reveals the Spirit as coming into the hearts of believers and *crying* Abba, Father. Now, inasmuch, as you have not only the mention of the separate names, but also certain special operations ascribed to each, it is plain that you have here, the distinct personality of each. Neither the Father, nor the Son, nor the Spirit can be an influence, or a mere form of existence, for each one acts in a divine manner, but with a special sphere and a distinct mode of operation. The error of regarding a certain divine person as a mere influence, or emanation, mainly assails the Holy Spirit, but its falseness is seen in the words—“crying, Abba, Father”—an influence could not cry. The act requires a person to perform it. Though we may not understand the wonderful truth of the undivided Unity and the distinct personality of the Triune Godhead, yet, nevertheless, we see the truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures and therefore, we accept it as a matter of faith.

The divinity of each of these sacred persons is also to be gathered from the text and its connection. We do not doubt the divinity of the Father, for He is here distinctly mentioned as “God,” twice is the Father evidently intended when the word, “God,” is used. That the Son is God is implied, for though made of a woman, as to His human nature, He is described as “sent forth” and therefore, He was pre-existent before He was sent forth and made of a woman. This, together with His being called the Son of God, and His being spoken of as able to redeem, are to our minds sufficient proofs of deity. The Spirit is said to do what only God can do, namely, to dwell in the hearts of all believers. It is not possible for any being to cry in the hearts of a multitude of men if He were not omnipresent and therefore divine. So here we have the name of each divine Person, the working of each, the personality of each, and in some degree the deity of each, within the compass of a few lines. As for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, they know how necessary is the co-operation of the entire Trinity to our salvation, and they are charmed to see the loving union of all in the work of deliverance. We reverence the Father, without whom we had not been chosen or adopted, the Father who has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. We love and reverence the Son by whose most precious blood we have been redeemed and with whom we are one in a mystic and everlasting union. And we adore and love the divine Spirit, for it is by Him that we have been regenerated, illuminated, quickened, preserved and sanctified, and it is through Him that we receive the seal and witness, within our hearts, by which we are assured that we are indeed the sons of God. As God said of old, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness,” even so do the divine Persons take counsel together, and all unite in the new creation of the believer. We must not fail to bless, adore and love each one of the exalted Persons, but we must diligently bow in humblest reverence before the one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Glory be to the

Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.”

Having noted this most important fact, let us come to the text itself, hoping to enjoy the doctrine of the Trinity while we are discoursing upon our adoption, in which wonder of grace they each have a share. Under the teaching of the divine Spirit may we be drawn into sweet communion with the Father through His Son Jesus Christ, to His glory and to our benefit.

Three things are very clearly set forth in my text. The first is *the dignity of believers*—“you are sons.” The second is *the consequent indwelling of the Holy Spirit*—“because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” And the third is *the filial cry*—crying, “Abba, Father.”

I. First, then, THE DIGNITY OF BELIEVERS. Adoption gives us the rights of children. Regeneration gives us the nature of children. We are partakers of both of these, for we are sons.

And let us here observe that *this sonship is a gift of grace received by faith*. We are not the sons of God by nature in the sense here meant. We are in a sense “the offspring of God” by nature, but this is very different from the sonship here described, which is the peculiar privilege of those who are born again. The Jews claimed to be of the family of God, but as their privileges came to them by the way of their fleshly birth, they are likened to Ishmael, who was born after the flesh, but who was cast out as the son of the bondwoman and compelled to give way to the son of the promise. We have a sonship which does not come to us by nature, for we are “born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” Our sonship comes by promise, by the operation of God as a special gift to a peculiar seed, set apart unto the Lord by His own sovereign grace, as Isaac was. This honor and privilege come to us, according to the connection of our text, by faith. Note well the twenty-sixth verse of the preceding chapter (Gal. 3:26): “For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” As unbelievers we know nothing of adoption. While we are under the law as self-righteous we know something of servitude, but we know nothing of sonship. It is only after that faith has come that we cease to be under the schoolmaster, and rise out of our minority to take the privileges of the sons of God.

Faith works in us the spirit of adoption and our consciousness of sonship, in this wise, first, *it brings us justification*. Verse twenty-four of the previous chapter says, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” An unjustified man stands in the condition of a criminal, not of a child. His sin is laid to his charge, he is reckoned as unjust and unrighteous, as indeed he really is, and he is therefore a rebel against his king, and not a child enjoying his father’s love. But when faith realizes the cleansing power of the blood of atonement and lays hold upon the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus, then the justified man becomes a son and a child. Justification and adoption always go together. “Whom He called them He also justified” and the calling is a call to the Father’s house and to recognition of sonship. Believing brings forgiveness and justification through our Lord Jesus. It also brings adoption, for it is written, “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.”

Faith brings us into the realization of our adoption, in the next place, by *setting us free from the bondage of the law*. “After that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.” When we groaned under a sense of sin and were shut up by it as in a prison, we feared that the law would punish us for our iniquity and our life was made bitter with fear. Moreover, we strove in our own blind self-sufficient manner to keep that law and this brought us into yet another bondage, which became harder and harder and as failure succeeded to failure, we sinned and stumbled more and more to our soul’s confusion. But now that faith has come, we see the law fulfilled in Christ, and ourselves justified and accepted in Him, this changes the slave into a child and duty into choice. Now we delight in the law, and by the power of the Spirit we walk in holiness to the glory of God. Thus it is that by believing in Christ Jesus we escape from Moses, the taskmaster, and come to Jesus, the Savior. We cease to regard God as an angry Judge and view Him as our loving Father. The system of merit and command, punishment and fear has given way to the rule of grace, gratitude and love, and this new principle of government is one of the grand privileges of the children of God.

Now, *faith is the mark of sonship in all who have it*, whoever they may be, for “you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). If you believe in Jesus, whether you are Jew or Gentile, bond or free, you are a son of God. If you have only believed in Christ of late and have but for the past few weeks been able to rest in His great salvation, yet, beloved, now are you a child of God. It is

not a later privilege, granted to assurance or growth in grace. It is an early blessing and belongs to him who has the smallest degree of faith and is no more than a baby in grace. If a man is a believer in Jesus Christ, his name is in the register of the great family above, “for you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” But if you have no faith, no matter what zeal; no matter what works; no matter what knowledge; no matter what pretensions to holiness you may possess, you are nothing and your religion is vain. Without faith in Christ you are as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal, for without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith then, wherever it is found, is the infallible token of a child of God and its absence is fatal to the claim.

This according to the apostle is further illustrated by our baptism, for in baptism, if there is faith in the soul, there is an open putting on of the Lord Jesus Christ. Read the twenty-seventh verse: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” In baptism you professed to be dead to the world and you were therefore, buried into the name of Jesus. And the meaning of that burial, if it had any right meaning to you, was that you professed yourself to be dead to everything but Christ and henceforth your life was to be in Him and you were to be as one raised from the dead to newness of life. Of course the outward form means nothing to the unbeliever, but to the man who is in Christ it is a most instructive ordinance. The spirit and essence of the ordinance, lie in the soul’s entering into the symbol, in the man’s knowing not only the baptism into water, but the baptism into the Holy Spirit and into fire. And as many of you as know that inward mystic baptism into Christ, know also that henceforth you have put on Christ and are covered by Him as a man is by his garment. Henceforth you are one in Christ. You wear His name, you live in Him, you are saved by Him, and you are altogether His. Now, if you are one with Christ, since He is a son, you are also sons. If you have put on Christ, God sees you not in yourself but in Christ, and that which belongs to Christ belongs also to you, for if you are Christ’s, then are you Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise. As the Roman youth, when he came of age, put on the *toga* and was admitted to the rights of citizenship, so the putting on of Christ is the token of our admission into the position of sons of God. Thus are we actually admitted to the enjoyment of our glorious heritage. Every blessing of the covenant of grace belongs to those who are Christ’s and every believer is on that list. Thus, then, according to the teaching of the passage, we receive adoption by faith as the gift of grace.

Again, *adoption comes to us by redemption*. Read the passage which precedes the text—“But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Beloved, prize redemption and never listen to teaching which would destroy its meaning or lower its importance. Remember that you were not redeemed with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish. You were under the law and subject to its curse, for you had broken it most grievously. And you were subject to its penalty, for it is written, “The soul that sins, it shall die.” And yet again, “cursed is everyone that continues not in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” You were also under the terror of the law, for you feared its wrath and you were under its irritating power, for often when the commandment came, sin within you revived and you died. But now you are redeemed from all. As the Holy Spirit says, “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree.” Now you are not under the law, but under grace, and this because Christ came under the law and kept it both by His active and His passive obedience, fulfilling all its commands and bearing its entire penalty on your behalf and in your place. Henceforth you are the redeemed of the Lord and enjoy a liberty which comes by no other way but that of the eternal ransom. Remember this and whenever you feel most assured that you are a child of God, praise the redeeming blood, whenever your heart beats highest with love to your great Father, bless the “firstborn among many brethren,” who, for your sakes came under the law, was circumcised, kept the law in His life and bowed His head to it in His death, honoring and magnifying the law and making the justice and righteousness of God to be more conspicuous by His life than it would have been by the holiness of all mankind. And He made God’s justice to be more fully vindicated by His death than it would have been if all the world of sinners had been cast into hell. Glory be to our redeeming Lord, by whom we have received the adoption!

Again, we further learn from the passage that *we now enjoy the privilege of sonship*. According to the run of the passage the apostle means not only that we are children, but that we are full-grown sons.

“Because you are sons” means—because the time appointed of the Father is come, and you are of age and no longer under tutors and governors. In our minority we are under the schoolmaster, under the regimen of ceremonies, under types, figures, shadows, learning our A B C’s by being convicted of sin. But when faith is come, we are no longer under the schoolmaster but come to a more free condition. Till faith comes we are under tutors and governors, like mere boys, but after faith, we take our rights as sons of God. The Jewish church of old was under the yoke of the law. Its sacrifices were continual and its ceremonies endless. New moons and feasts had to be kept. Jubilees had to be observed and pilgrimages made. In fact, the yoke was too heavy for feeble flesh to bear. The law followed the Israelite into every corner and dealt with him upon every point. It had to do with his garments, his meat, his drink, his bed, his board and everything about him. It treated him like a boy at school who has a rule for everything. Now that faith has come we are full grown sons, and therefore we are free from the rules which govern the school of the child. We are under law to Christ, even as the full-grown son is still under the discipline of his father’s house, but this is a law of love and not of fear, of grace and not of bondage. “Stand fast therefore, in the liberty with which Christ has made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” Return not to the beggarly elements of a merely outward religion, but keep close to the worship of God in spirit and in truth, for this is the liberty of the children of God.

Now, by faith *we are no more like bondservants*. The apostle says that, “the heir, as long as he is a child, differs nothing from a servant, though he is lord of all; but is under tutors and governors till the time appointed of the father.” But, beloved, you are now the sons of God and you have come to your majority, now you are now free to enjoy the honors and blessings of the Father’s house. Rejoice that the free Spirit dwells within you and prompts you to holiness. This is a far superior power to the merely external command and the whip of threats. Now no more are you in bondage to outward forms, rites and ceremonies, but the Spirit of God teaches you all things, and leads you into the inner meaning and substance of truth.

Now, also, says the apostle, *we are heirs*—“As a result you are no more a servant, but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.” No man living has ever realized to the fullest, what this means. Believers are at this moment heirs, but what is the estate? It is God Himself! We are heirs of God! Not only of the promises, of the covenant engagements and of all the blessings which belong to the chosen seed, but heirs of God Himself. “The Lord is my portion, says my soul.” “This God is our God forever and ever.” We are not only heirs to God, to all that He gives to His firstborn, but heirs of God, Himself. David said, “The Lord is the portion of my inheritance and of my cup.” As God said to Abraham, “Fear not Abraham, I am your shield and your exceeding great reward,” so says He to every man that is born of the Spirit. These are His own words—“I will be to them a God and they shall be to Me a people.” Why, then, O believer, are you poor? All riches are yours. Why, then, are you sorrowful? The ever-blessed God is yours. Why do you tremble? Omnipotence waits to help you. Why do you distrust? His immutability will abide with you even to the end and make His promises steadfast. All things are yours, for Christ is yours and Christ is God’s. And though there are some things which at present you cannot actually grasp in your hand, nor even see with your eyes, namely, the things which are laid up for you in heaven, yet still by faith you can enjoy even these, for “He has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ,” “in whom also we have obtained an inheritance,” so that, “our citizenship is in heaven.” We enjoy even now the pledge and earnest of heaven in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Oh what privileges belong to those who are the sons of God!

Once more upon this point of the believer’s dignity, *we already taste some of the inevitable consequences of being the sons of God*. What are they? One of them is the opposition of the children of the bondwoman. No sooner had the apostle Paul preached the liberty of the saints, than straightway there arose certain teachers who said, “This will never do. You must be circumcised; you must come under the law.” Their opposition was to Paul a token that he was of the free woman, for, behold, the children of the bondwoman singled him out for their virulent opposition. You shall find, dear brothers and sisters, that if you enjoy fellowship with God, if you live in the spirit of adoption, if you are brought near to the Most High so as to be a member of the divine family, straightway all those who are under bondage to the law will quarrel with you. Thus says the apostle, “As then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.” The child of Hagar was found by Sarah to be mocking Isaac, the child of promise. Ishmael would have been glad to have shown his enmity to the hat-

ed heir by blows and personal assault, but there was a superior power to check him, so that he could get no further than “mocking.” So it is now. There have been periods in which the enemies of the gospel have gone a great deal further than mocking, for they have been able to imprison and burn alive the lovers of the gospel, but now, thank God, we are under His special protection as to life and limb and liberty and are as safe as Isaac was in Abraham’s house. They can mock us, but they cannot go any further, or else some of us would be publicly hung. But trials of cruel mocking are still to be endured, our words are twisted, our sentiments are misrepresented and all sorts of horrible things are imputed to us, things which we know not, to all which we would reply with Paul, “Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” This is the old way of the Hagarenes; the child after the flesh is still doing his best to mock him that is born after the Spirit. Do not be astonished, nor grieved in the least degree when this happens to any of you. But let this turn to the establishment of your confidence and to the confirmation of your faith in Christ Jesus, for He told you of old, “If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.”

II. Our second head is THE CONSEQUENT INDWELLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN BELIEVERS—“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” *Here is a divine act of the Father.* The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and God has sent Him forth into your hearts. If He had only come knocking at your hearts and asked your leave to enter, He had never entered. But when Jehovah sent Him, He made His way without violating your will, but with irresistible power. Where Jehovah sent Him, there He will abide and go no more out forever. Beloved, I have no time to dwell upon the words, but I want you to turn them over in your thoughts, for they contain a great depth. As surely as God sent His Son into the world to dwell among men, so that His saints beheld His glory, the “glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,” so surely has God sent forth the Spirit to enter into men’s hearts, there to take up His residence that in Him also, the glory of God may be revealed. Bless and adore the Lord who has sent you such a visitor as this.

Now, note the style and title under which the Holy Spirit comes to us. *He comes as the Spirit of Jesus.* The words are “the Spirit of His Son,” by which is not meant the character and disposition of Christ, though that was quite true, for God sends this unto His people, but it means the Holy Spirit. Why then, is He called the Spirit of His Son, or the Spirit of Jesus? May we not give these reasons? It was by the Holy Spirit that the human nature of Christ was born of the Virgin. By the Spirit our Lord was attested at His baptism, when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove and abode upon Him. In Him the Holy Spirit dwelt without measure, anointing Him for His great work and by the Spirit He was anointed with the oil of gladness more than His fellows. The Spirit was also with Him, attesting His ministry by signs and wonders. The Holy Spirit is our Lord’s great gift to the church. It was after His ascension that He bestowed the gifts of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit descended upon the church to abide with the people of God forever. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, because He is Christ’s witness here below, for “there are three that bear witness on earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood.” For these and many other reasons He is called “the Spirit of His Son” and it is He who comes to dwell in believers. I would urge you very solemnly and gratefully to consider the wondrous condescension which is here displayed. God Himself, the Holy Spirit, takes up His residence in believers. I never know which is the more wonderful, the incarnation of Christ or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus dwelt here for a while in human flesh untainted by sin, holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. But the Holy Spirit dwells continually in the hearts of all believers, though as yet they are imperfect and prone to evil. Year after year, century after century, He still abides in the saints and will do so till the elect are all in glory. While we adore the incarnate Son, let us adore also the indwelling Spirit whom the Father has sent.

Now *notice the place wherein He takes up His residence*—“God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” Note that it does not say into your heads or your brains. The Spirit of God, doubtless, illuminates the intellect and guides the judgment, but this is not the commencement or the main part of His work. He comes chiefly to the affections. He dwells with the heart, for with the heart man believes unto righteousness and “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.” Now, the heart is the center of our being, and therefore does the Holy Spirit occupy this place of vantage. He comes into the central fortress and universal citadel of our nature, and thus takes possession of the whole. The heart is the vital part. We speak of it as the chief residence of life, and therefore the Holy Spirit enters it, and as

the living God dwells in the living heart, taking possession of the very core and marrow of our being. It is from the heart and through the heart that life is diffused. The blood is sent to the extremities of the body by the pulsing of the heart and when the Spirit of God takes possession of the affections, He operates upon every power, and faculty and member of our entire manhood. Out of the heart are the issues of life, and from the affections sanctified by the Holy Spirit all other faculties and powers receive renewal, illumination, sanctification, strengthening and ultimate perfection.

This wonderful blessing is ours “because we are sons,” and *it is filled with marvelous results*. Sonship sealed by the indwelling Spirit brings us peace and joy. It leads to nearness to God and fellowship with Him. It excites trust, love, and vehement desire and creates in us reverence, obedience and actual likeness to God, all this and much more, because the Holy Spirit has come to dwell in us. Oh, matchless mystery! Had it not been revealed, it had never been imagined, and now that it is revealed, it would never have been believed if it had not become matter of actual experience to those who are in Christ Jesus. There are many professors who know nothing of this. They listen to us with bewilderment as if we told them an idle tale, for the carnal mind knows not the things that are of God. They are spiritual and can only be spiritually understood. Those who are not sons or who only come in as sons under the law of nature, like Ishmael, know nothing of this indwelling Spirit, and are up in arms at us for daring to claim so great a blessing. Yet it is ours and none can deprive us of it.

III. Now I come to the third portion of our text—THE FILIAL CRY. This is deeply interesting. I think it will be profitable if your minds enter into it. Where the Holy Spirit enters there is a cry. “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son, crying, ‘Abba, Father.’” Now notice *it is the Spirit of God that cries*—a most remarkable fact. Some are inclined to view the expression as a Hebraism and read it, He “makes us to cry,” but, beloved, the text does not say that and we are not at liberty to alter it upon such a pretense. We are always correct in keeping to what God says and here we plainly read of the Spirit in our hearts that He is crying, “Abba, Father.” The apostle, in Romans 8:15, says, “You have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby *we* cry, Abba, Father,” but here he describes the Spirit Himself, as crying, “Abba, Father.” We are certain that when he ascribed the cry of, “Abba, Father,” to us, he did not wish to exclude the Spirit’s cry, because in the twenty-sixth verse of the famous eighth chapter of Romans, he says, “Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Thus he represents the Spirit Himself as groaning with unutterable groans within the child of God, so that when he wrote to the Romans he had on his mind the same thought which he here expressed to the Galatians—that it is the Spirit Himself, which cries and groans in us, “Abba, Father.” How is this? Is it not ourselves that cry? Yes, assuredly. And yet the Spirit cries also. The expressions are both correct. The Holy Spirit prompts and inspires the cry. He puts the cry into the heart and mouth of the believer. It is His cry because He suggests it, approves of it and educates us to it. We would never have cried thus if He had not first taught us the way. As a mother teaches her child to speak, so He puts this cry of, “Abba, Father,” into our mouths. Yes, it is He who forms in our hearts the desire after our Father, God, and keeps it there. He is the Spirit of adoption and the author of adoption’s special and significant cry.

Not only does He prompt us to cry, but He works in us a sense of need which compels us to cry, and also that spirit of confidence which emboldens us to claim such relationship to the great God. Nor is this all, for He assists us in some mysterious manner so that we are able to pray aright. He puts His divine energy into us so that we cry, “Abba, Father,” in an acceptable manner. There are times when *we* cannot cry at all and then He cries in us. There are seasons when doubts and fears abound, and so suffocate us with their fumes that we cannot even raise a cry, and then the indwelling Spirit represents us, speaks for us, and makes intercession for us, crying in our name and making intercession for us according to the will of God. Thus does the cry, “Abba, Father,” rise up in our hearts even when we feel as if we could not pray, and dare not think ourselves children. Then we may each say, “I live, yet not I, but the Spirit that dwells in me.” On the other hand, at times our soul gives such a sweet assent to the Spirit’s cry that it becomes ours also, but then we more than ever acknowledge the work of the Spirit and still ascribe to Him the blessed cry, “Abba, Father.”

I want you, now, to notice a very sweet fact about this cry, namely, that *it is literally the cry of the Son*. God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, and that Spirit cries in us exactly according to the cry of the Son. If you turn to the gospel of Mark, at the fourteenth chapter, thirty-sixth verse, you will

find there what you will not discover in any other evangelist (for Mark is always the man for the striking points and the memorable words), he records that our Lord prayed in the garden, “Abba, Father, all things are possible unto You; take away this cup from Me: nevertheless not what I will, but what You will,” so that this cry in us copies the cry of our Lord to the letter—“Abba, Father.” Now, I dare say you have heard these words “Abba, Father” explained at considerable length at other times. And if so, you know that the first word is Syrian or Aramaic, or roughly speaking, Abba is the Hebrew word for “father.” The second word is in Greek and is the Gentile word, “Pater,” which also signifies father. It is said that these two words are used to remind us that Jews and Gentiles are one before God. They do remind us of this, but this cannot have been the principal reason for their use. Do you think that when our Lord was in His agony in the garden that He said, “Abba, Father,” because Jews and Gentiles are one? Why should He have thought of that doctrine and why need He mention it in prayer to His Father? Some other reason must have suggested it to Him. It seems to me that our Lord said, “Abba,” because it was His native tongue. When a Frenchman prays, if he has learned English, he may ordinarily pray in English, but if ever he falls into an agony he will pray in French, as surely as he prays at all. Our Welsh brethren tell us that there is no language like Welsh—I suppose it is so to *them*. Now they will talk English when about their ordinary business and they can pray in English when everything goes comfortably with them, but I am sure that if a Welshman is in a great fervency of prayer, he flies to his Welsh tongue to find full expression. Our Lord in His agony used His native language, and as born of the seed of Abraham He cries in His own tongue, “Abba.” Even thus, my brethren, we are prompted by the spirit of adoption to use our own language, the language of the heart, and to speak to the Lord freely in our own tongue. Besides, to my mind, the word “Abba” is of all words in all languages the most natural word for father. I must try and pronounce it so that you see the natural childishness of it, “Ab-ba,” “Ab-ba.” Is it not just what your children say, ab, ab, ba, ba, as soon as they try to talk? It is the sort of word which any child would say, whether Hebrew, or Greek, or French, or English. Therefore, Abba is a word worthy of introduction into all languages. It is truly a child’s word, and our Master felt, I have no doubt, in His agony, a love for child’s words. Dr. Guthrie, when he was dying, said, “Sing a hymn,” but he added, “*Sing me one of the children’s hymns.*” When a man comes to die, he wants to be a child again, and longs for children’s hymns and children’s words. Our blessed Master in His agony used the children’s word, “Abba,” and it is equally becoming in the mouth of each one of us. I think this sweet word, “Abba,” was chosen to show us that we are to be very natural with God and not stilted and formal. We are to be very affectionate and come close to Him and not merely say, “Pater,” which is a cold Greek word, but say, “Abba,” which is a warm, natural, loving word, fit for one who is a little child with God and makes bold to lie in His bosom, and look up into His face and talk with holy boldness. “Abba” is not a word, somehow, but a baby’s lisping. Oh, how near we are to God when we can use such a speech! How dear He is to us and dear we are to Him when we may thus address Him, saying, like the great Son, Himself, “Abba, Father.”

This leads me to observe that *this cry in our hearts is exceedingly near and familiar*. In the sound of it I have shown you that it is childlike, but the tone and manner of the utterance are equally so. Note that it is *a cry*. If we obtain audience with a king we do not cry, we speak then in measured tones and set phrases. But the Spirit of God breaks down our measured tones and takes away the formality which some hold in great admiration, and He leads us to *cry*, which is the very reverse of formality and stiffness. When we cry, we cry, “Abba.” Even our very cries are full of the spirit of adoption. A cry is a sound which we are not anxious that every passer-by should hear, yet what child minds his father hearing him cry? So when our heart is broken and subdued we do not feel as if we could talk fine language at all, but the Spirit in us sends forth cries and groans, and of these we are not ashamed, nor are we afraid to cry before God. I know some of you think that God will not hear your prayers, because you cannot pray grandly like such-and-such a minister. Oh, but the Spirit of His Son cries, and you cannot do better than cry too. Be satisfied to offer to God broken language, words salted with your grief, wet with your tears. Go to Him with holy familiarity and be not afraid to cry in His presence, “Abba, Father.”

But then *how earnest it is*. For a cry is an intense thing. The word implies fervency. A cry is not a flippant utterance, nor a mere thing of the lips. It comes up from the soul. Has not the Lord taught us to cry to Him in prayer with fervent persistence that will not take a denial? Has He not brought us so near to Him that sometimes we say, “I will not let You go unless You bless me”? Has He not taught us so to

pray that His disciples might almost say of us as they did of one of old, “Send her away, for she cries after us.” We do cry after Him, our heart and our flesh cry out for God, for the living God, and this is the cry, “Abba, Father. I must know You, I must taste Your love, I must dwell under Your wing, I must behold Your face, I must feel Your great fatherly heart overflowing and filling my heart with peace.” We cry, “Abba, Father.”

I shall close when I notice this, that, *the most of this crying is kept within the heart, and does not come out at the lips*. Like Moses we cry when we say not a word. God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son *into our hearts*, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father.” You know what I mean. It is not alone in your little room, by the old armchair, that you cry to God, but you call Him, “Abba, Father,” as you go about the streets or work in the shop. The Spirit of His Son is crying, “Abba, Father,” when you are in the crowd or at your table among the family. I see it is alleged as a very grave charge against me that I speak as if I were familiar with God. If it is so, I make bold to say that I speak only as I feel. Blessed be my heavenly Father’s name, I know I am His child, and with whom should a child be familiar but with His father? O you strangers to the living God, be it known unto you, that if this is vile, I purpose to be viler still, as He shall help me to walk more closely with Him. We feel a deep reverence for our Father in heaven, which bows us to the very dust, but for all that we can say, “Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.” No stranger can understand the nearness of the believer’s soul to God in Christ Jesus, and because the world cannot understand it, it finds it convenient to sneer, but what of that? Abraham’s tenderness to Isaac made Ishmael jealous and caused him to laugh, but Isaac had no cause to be ashamed of being ridiculed, since the mocker could not rob him of the covenant blessing. Yes, beloved, the Spirit of God makes you cry, “Abba, Father,” but the cry is mainly within your heart, and there it is so commonly uttered that it becomes the habit of your soul to be crying to your heavenly Father. The text does not say that He had cried, but the expression is, “*crying*”—it is a present participle, indicating that He cries every day, “Abba, Father.” Go home, my brethren, and live in the spirit of sonship. Wake up in the morning and let your first thought be, “My Father, my Father, be with me this day.” Go out into business and when things perplex you, let that be your resort—“My Father, help me in this hour of need.” When you go to your home and meet with domestic anxieties, let your cry be, “Help me, my Father.” When alone, you are not alone, because the Father is with you. And in the midst of the crowd you are not in danger, because the Father Himself loves you. What a blessed word is that—“The Father Himself loves you”! Go and live as His children. Take heed that you reverence Him, for if He is a father, where is His fear? Go and obey Him, for this is right. Be imitators of God as dear children. Honor Him wherever you are by adorning His doctrine in all things. Go and live upon Him, for you shall soon live with Him. Go and rejoice in Him. Go and cast all your cares upon Him. Go henceforth and whatever men may see in you may they be compelled to acknowledge that you are the children of the Highest. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.” May you be such henceforth and evermore. Amen and amen.

**PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GALATIANS 3:22-23, 4, 5:1-6
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—728, 468, 221.**

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