

Trevor J. Burke

Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8

The apostle Paul employs the motif of huiiothesia ('adoption as sons') five times in three of his letters (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5). Two of these are located in Romans 8, a chapter better known for its instruction concerning the Spirit; indeed in this chapter Paul brings together the two ideas of the Spirit and adoption in the hapax legomenon, pneuma huiiothesias, 'Spirit of "adoption as sons"' (8:15). The purpose of this article is to explore the relationship between adoption and the Spirit¹ as delineated in Romans 8. But before turning directly to this question we need to see it within the context of Rom. 7.

I. The old era of the Torah (Rom. 7) and the new epoch of the Pneuma (Rom. 8)

Paul discusses adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8 (and Galatians 4) against the background of the Torah. In Rom. 7 the Law and its synonyms are referred to 31 times but the Holy Spirit only once (v. 6); in Rom. 8:1-27 the Spirit is referred to 21 times and the noun *nomos* only 5 times. In chapter 7 (and elsewhere in the corpus Paulinum) the apostle has a number of pejorative as well as positive statements to make concerning the Law.² More specifically, it is here as much as anywhere else that we are faced with a much wider debate, namely, the tortuous subject of Paul and the Law and the problem of how to reconcile his many depreciatory statements regarding the Torah with other more positive comments, often in the same context, where he affirms the Torah as wholesome and good and as having been 'established/upheld by faith'. For example, with regard to the former, Paul speaks of the Law as bringing an awareness of sin (Rom. 7:7); indeed the 'sinful passions are aroused by the Law' (7:5). Further, the Law

¹ Scholars have long been preoccupied with the most appropriate *background* to Paul's *huiiothesia* motif as evidenced by two recent monographs: B. Byrne, *Sons of God-Seed of Abraham: A Study of the Idea of the Sonship of God of all Christians against the Jewish Background* (An. Bib. 83; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1979); James M. Scott, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of HUIIOTHESIA in the Corpus Paulinum* (WUNT 2.48; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1992).

² In spite of much discussion regarding the identification of the person (i.e. non-Christian, Christian or young Christian) or people (ie. Israel under the Law) in Rom. 7 the issue of anthropology is subordinate to that of the Mosaic Law; see K. Stendahl *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 21.

actually increases and magnifies the degree of sinfulness in the world (5:20; cf. Gal. 3:19). To be under Law is to be under slavery (7:25) and locked up as a prisoner (7:6; Gal. 3:23). Therefore the Law is unable to bring life (7:14–25; 8:1–4). Rather, it is the very instrument by which individuals are condemned to death (7:10–11; cf. Gal. 3:21). A clear note of discontinuity³ is sounded in Rom. 7:6, 'by dying to what once bound us, we have been *released* from the Law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code'. On the other hand, Paul has a number of positive statements to make regarding the Law. He regards the Law as 'holy', 'righteous' (Rom. 7:12), 'spiritual' (Rom. 7:14) and 'good' (Rom. 7:16). Indeed, the apostle states, 'in my inner being I *delight* in God's Law' (7:22). Earlier in the letter Paul states that despite the revelation of Christ the Law is still relevant and authoritative for all of God's people; 'faith does not nullify the Law'; on the contrary it 'establishes, or upholds it' (Rom. 3:31). While some aspects of the Law have reached their omega-point (eg. circumcision) the 'keeping of the commandments of God' has clearly not (cf. Rom. 13:8; I Cor. 7:19). Thus, there is an important aspect of continuity as far as Paul's understanding of the Torah is concerned.

These apparently irreconcilable differences concerning Paul and the Law have been 'solved'⁴ in various ways. However, rarely have scholars seriously considered the Spirit as *a (the)* solution to Paul's understanding of the Law.⁵ We have already seen at the beginning of Rom. 7 that the apostle lays down the main markers by which he means to proceed, namely, that the 'old way of the written code' has been

³ Christian interpreters agree that there is some continuity of the Mosaic Law now that the new covenant has been inaugurated. The moot point is the degree of continuity; see T. Schreiner, *The Law and its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 123–143.

⁴ The traditional interpretation that the Law was replaced by faith in Christ tends to read the Old Testament as though 'keeping the Law' were a means of earning the favour of God. Sanders has recently argued that the Christian church has been reading Paul's struggle with Judaism through Lutheran spectacles, but this continues to be debated. Recent responses to E. P. Sanders' 'new perspective' have understood the Law in *national* (J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* ([Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990]) and *sociological* (F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach*, [SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: University Press, 1986]) terms.

⁵ N. Q. Hamilton writes, 'the Spirit replaces the function of such a code and by His determining influence produces regulated action without any code. In harmony with this replacing of the Law, the Spirit takes over the former function of the Law as the norm and guide for all life' (*The Holy Spirit and Eschatology in Paul* [*SJT Occas. Papers No. 6* 30]). G. Fee also states, 'The key to Paul's view of the Law lies with the gift of the eschatological Spirit' (*God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994], 816).

replaced by the 'new way of the Spirit' (7:6). This highlights the difference between the old era of the Law and the new epoch of the Spirit. All this anticipates what Paul is about to discuss in greater detail about 'another law' (viz. that of the *pneuma*)⁶ which he then goes on to relate to his adoption motif in Rom. 8.

But before Paul goes on to speak at length about the activity of the Spirit and adoption, he grounds it all in the *work* of Gods' Son.⁷ In the opening verses of Rom. 8 are a number of juridical statements⁸ made in relation to the sending of God's Son 'as a sin offering' (v. 3) to 'condemn sin' (v. 4). Again the purpose of this saving activity was 'that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fully met in us' (v. 4). This latter phrase has been interpreted in two main ways. Firstly, some understand it in purely juristic terms. Only *Christ by his death* (v. 3) has fully and perfectly met the requirement of the Law and because of this believers are free from condemnation and counted as righteous in him. Other commentators understand Paul as here referring to what happens to the *person* who is in Christ. Thus, God's intention was not just to deliver people from condemnation but to make possible 'the righteous requirement of the Law'; 'God's commands have now become God's enablers'.⁹ But there seems no good reason to divorce the two opinions.¹⁰ Christ by his sacrifice has alone fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law but it is only as Christians are 'in him' that they can ever live as God intended—in the power of the Spirit of God.¹¹ The gift of the Spirit for those who are justified by faith in Christ brings about an obedience from the heart that the Law demanded. This is in keeping with the Old Testament promises (Is. 11:1–10; 32:14–18; Jer. 31:31–34; Ezk. 11:17–20 and Ezk. 36:27, 'I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and obey my laws'). The Spirit marks the inauguration of a new covenant, and heralds the end of the Torah, the old covenant as a way of life. The same Jewish hope is also clear from the eschatological promise in the later rabbinic literature, 'And I will create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from me that day and forever. And

⁶ W. C. Coetzer, 'The Holy Spirit and the Eschatological View in Paul,' *Neot.* 15 (1981), 180–198.

⁷ S. Greijdanus states 'It is not the reception of the Spirit which is objectively the cause of being set free from the law, but Christ's advent and work of reconciliation'. (*De brief van den Apostel Paulus aan de Gemeeten in Galatie* [1936, 262]).

⁸ R. Gundry, 'Grace, Works and Staying Saved in Paul,' *Bib.* 60 (1985), 1–38.

⁹ F. F. Bruce *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC. London; Intervarsity Press, 1969), 162.

¹⁰ L. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Erdmanns/IVP, 1988), 304.

¹¹ Fee's comment on v. 4 is most helpful: 'Primarily through the work of Christ but in the last instance through the work of the Holy Spirit God has brought the time of the Law to an end'. [emphasis mine] (*God's Empowering Presence*), 530.

their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments. And they will do my commandments' (*Jub.* 1:23–24). Such a hope persisted well into the Second Temple period, 'May God cleanse Israel against the day of mercy and blessing. Against the day of choice when He brings back His anointed' (*Pss. Sol.* 18:6). And it is one also shared by the Qumran sectarians, 'It is through a holy spirit uniting him to his truth that he shall be purified from all his iniquities. It is through a spirit of uprightness and humility that his sin shall be wiped out. And it is through the submission of the soul to all the statutes of God' (1 QS 3. 6–8; 1QS 4.5, 11, 18). The difference for Paul is that the Spirit represents the in-breaking,—the 'first fruits' (*Rom.* 8:23)—of the last days in the present as the portion of life and the power of the future age to come. In fact Paul writes elsewhere, 'If you are led by the Spirit you are *no longer under Law*' (*Gal.* 5:18)

II. The Spirit of adoption

If the Spirit is a key to any proper understanding of Paul and the Law, the Spirit is also crucial to what Paul has to state regarding his thesis on adoption. The sheer range and scope of the activity of the Spirit in *Romans 8* is well illustrated; the Spirit is referred to as *pneuma* (v. 4); *pneuma zoes* (v. 2); *pneuma theou* (vv. 9, 14); *pneuma Christou* (v. 9) and to *pneuma tou egeirantos Yesoun ek nekron* (v. 11). So integral is the *pneuma* to adoption, that, Paul brings these two ideas together in the phrase *pneuma huiiothesias* (v. 15).

But why does Paul bring the two ideas of the Spirit and adoption together at this point in his argument? Does the reason not lie in the fact that *adoption*, like the Spirit, was also a Jewish eschatological hope? To be sure a number of individuals and groups in the Old Testament are spoken of as 'sons of God'. For example, angels (*Gen.* 6:2, 4; *Job.* 1:6; 2:1; 38:7) and the king (*2 Sam.* 7:14; *Ps.* 2:7) enjoyed this status. More importantly, the nation of Israel is repeatedly referred to as God's son (*Ex.* 4:22; *Deut.* 14:1–2; 32:5–6; *Is.* 12–4; 30:9; 63:8; *Jer.* 3:19). Clearly sonship by adoption was Paul's understanding of Israel's relationship to God when he states, 'Theirs is the *huiiothesia*, theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises' (*Rom.* 9:4). One event more than any other, the exodus, is linked to God adopting Israel as his son, '*Out of Egypt* have I called my son' (*Hos.* 11:1).

Nevertheless, there is the eschatological hope in the Old Testament which looks forward to a time when 'The Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be counted. In the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people", they will be called "sons of the living God"' (*Hos.* 1:10). This Jewish hope was also shared in the later

rabbinic literature 'I will be a father to them and they will be called "sons of the living God"' (*Jub.* 1:25). Further, in the intertestamental¹² period the twin aspects of the Spirit and adoption are brought together in the promise 'He will pour down upon us the *spirit* of grace. And you shall be his true children by *adoption*. And you shall walk in his commandments first and last' (*T. Judah* 24:3-4).

Paul would have understood these hopes given his Jewish background and this is probably reflected in his using the expression *pneuma huiothesias* (Rom. 8:15). The significance of all this is that, 'for Paul it is the *Spirit* which is the primary reference point in defining the Christian's sonship, not in faithfulness to *the law* as understood by his Jewish contemporaries'.¹³ The difference for Paul is that such an eschatological hope has already begun 'those who are led by the Spirit *are (eisin)* the sons of God' (Rom. 8:14, 16). The consummation of this still lies ahead: 'The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed . . . Not only so, but we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the Spirit *wait* eagerly for (our) *adoption as sons* the redemption of our bodies' (Rom. 8:23).

The couplet *pneuma douleias* and *pneuma huiothesias* has been variously interpreted. It could be understood as a rhetorical device¹⁴ or as an expression of opposition between God and evil (1 QS 3:18ff. *T. Reub.* 5:3; *T. Levi* 2:3; 9:9; *T. Jud.* 13:3). Contextually the phrase *pneuma huiothesias* must refer to the Holy Spirit and here Paul is probably contrasting the Old Dispensation, the Law (Rom. 7), as one of fear and bondage, *pneuma douleias*, with the New Era, characterised by the Holy Spirit and adoption (Rom. 8).¹⁵ The contrast is not between two actual spirits but two possible *conditions* which the Spirit might bring about. In other words, Paul is making clear to his readers that the Spirit they have received is not one 'associated with and leading to slavery'—as if God's Spirit could do that!—but one 'associated with and leading to the "adoption of sons"'.¹⁶ Paul employs the word *palin* and refers to a state from which the Roman Christians had been delivered; they are no longer slaves but sons. Interestingly, in Galatians Paul lumps together the pre-Christian religious experiences of both Jews and Gentiles as turning back again (*palin*, Gal. 4:8) to the weak and miserable principles. For the Jew this meant a preoccupation with the

¹² Byrne considers the prominence of divine sonship in the intertestamental period (especially the Wisdom of Solomon 2:13, 16, 18; 5:5; 9:7; 12:7, 20; 16:10, 21, 26; 18:13; 19:6) to be an important part of the background to Paul's adoption term; see *Sons of God-Seed of Abraham*, 18ff.

¹³ Dunn, *Romans*, 451.

¹⁴ E.g. C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans* (Vol.1 ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), 396.

¹⁵ This is another possible interpretation; see Cranfield, *Romans* (Vol.1), 397.

¹⁶ I am grateful to I. H. Marshall for his assistance on this point.

Law which the apostle states is tantamount to slavery (Gal. 4:8; 9; 5:1).

The expression *pneuma huiiothesias* highlights for us a much debated issue, namely, the exact relationship (ie. chronology) between adoption and the Spirit.¹⁷ The answer to this turns upon the precise hermeneutic of this phrase. Verse 15 reads as follows:

ou gar elabete pneuma douleias palin eis phobon, alla elabete pneuma huiiothesias en ho krazomen abba ho pater

Some scholars understand the noun *huiiothesias* as an objective genitive: 'ein Geist, der Sohnschaft bewirkt'¹⁸ or 'the Spirit who brings about adoption'¹⁹ but this could be contested on two accounts. First, it is hard to find a grammatical category which allows for the genitive to be taken in this way,²⁰ and, second, *huiiothesias* could not be taken objectively because, if it was, the verbal noun would not as here stand in the genitive.²¹

Another unlikely interpretation is 'the Spirit who anticipates adoption'²² which understands adoption in purely eschatological terms ('we ourselves groan inwardly as we await (our) adoption as sons, the redemption of our body', *autoi en heautois stenazomen huiiothesian*²³

¹⁷ On the one hand Paul seems to suggest that our adoption as sons is the result of the gift of the Spirit. 'For as many as are led by the Spirit these are the sons of God . . . The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rom. 8:14, 16). On the other he also states that that the reception of the Spirit is the *sequel* to becoming sons, 'And because you are sons God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts . . .' (Gal. 4:6). In this respect C. Cosgrove writes, 'Since sonship and reception of the Spirit are so closely associated in early Christian thinking (especially in Paul's churches), the apostle can argue from the fact of one to the reality of the other. In Rom. 8:16 Paul points to the fact of the Spirit as evidence that his readers count as "sons". In Gal. 4:6 he moves in the other direction, from the fact of the Galatians' sonship to their reception of the Spirit on that basis. The unity of Rom. 8:16 and Gal. 4:6 lies not in their respective arguments but in their shared assumption that God gives the Spirit to his sons' [emphasis mine]; see *The Cross and the Spirit: A Study of the Argument and Theology of Galatians'* (Macon Ga.: University Press, 1988), 74.

¹⁸ P. von der Osten-Sacken, *Romer 8 als Beispiel paulinischer Soteriologie* (Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 112. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 135.

¹⁹ Cranfield, *Romans* Vol. 1, 397.

²⁰ Scott, *Adoption as Sons*, 261 n. 143 (*contra* Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 566 n. 277).

²¹ Byrne, *Sons of God-Seed of Abraham*, 100.

²² C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (HNTC. New York/London: Harper & Row, 1957), 163.

²³ The presence of *huiiothesian* in v. 23 has been regarded by some as an intrusion into the text because it does not sit comfortably alongside the fact that adoption has been already granted (vv. 14, 16) and is therefore complete. But if the presence of *huiiothesias* is a case of *lectio difficilior* then it is a better attested reading and should therefore be accepted (B. M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*. [London/New York: United Bible Societies, 1975], 517).

*apekdechomenoi*²⁴ *ten apolutrosin tou somatos hemon* (v. 23). The anticipatory dimension, as it relates to the consummation of adoption, is undoubtedly part of Paul's thesis of adoption but this by itself does not sufficiently acknowledge the 'now' or 'already' aspect underscored earlier on in the chapter in v. 14 (*houtoi huioi theou eisin*) and v. 16 (*esmen tekna theou*). Still others take the phrase to mean 'the Spirit who expresses adoption'²⁵ in that the Spirit does not actually make people sons but enables them to express this already filial disposition. This is possible but the witness of the Spirit is more relevant to Paul's argument a little later (cf. vv. 15–16).

What can we conclude from all this? It is probably best to understand the noun *huiiothesias* as a genitive of quality where there is a connection between adoption and the Spirit in the sense of 'a Spirit that "goes with" . . . *huiiothesia*'.²⁶ In Paul's view (and, as we have already seen, in other Jewish eschatological hopes) the era of the *pneuma* is also the era of *huiiothesia*. Indeed we could go further by saying that for Paul adoption and the Spirit are so closely connected they ought not to be separated; they are unitedly and reciprocally related.²⁷ If the presence and experience of the Spirit is inseparable from Christian *beginnings*²⁸ ('every Christian is indwelt by the Spirit',²⁹ Rom. 8:9), Paul, by employ-

²⁴ J. Swetnam tries to reconcile the two positions (omission or inclusion of the word *huiiothesian*) by taking the verb *ekdechesthai* to mean 'infer' and not 'await' (cf. BAGD 83) arriving at a translation, 'Not only creation but we ourselves who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, we also lament to ourselves, arriving at sonship by *inference*'. In other words sonship is arrived at by inference and is not a factor of the Christian's present experience. ('On Romans 8:23 and the "Expectation of Sonship."' *Bib.* 48 [1967], 102–108). But Swetnam does not take into consideration the apostle's usage of the same word in vv 19, and 25 where it must mean 'await'.

²⁵ J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*. (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans), 295.

²⁶ Byrne, *Sons of God-Seed of Abraham*, 100. Cosgrove also states, 'The Spirit comes with sonship in Christ'; see *The Cross and the Spirit*, 52.

²⁷ H. Ridderbos writes, 'There is in the Pauline pronouncements a peculiar relationship of reciprocity between the adoption as sons and the gift of the Spirit'; see *Paul: An Outline of his Theology* (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1975), 199.

²⁸ This after all was the point Paul is at pains to stress to the Galatian Christians. In this connection J. D. G. Dunn writes that, 'the Galatians receipt of the Spirit was the beginning of their experience as Christians (iii.2–3) and amply demonstrated their full acceptance by God, that is, as sons of Abraham and sons of God (iii.7, 26)'; see *The Epistle to the Galatians* (BNTC; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993), 219. Indeed in an effort to drive home to the Galatian Christians that their initial reception of the Spirit is indisputable evidence of their sonship to God the apostle bombards them with a number of stinging rhetorical questions 'Did you receive the Spirit?' (3:2); 'After beginning with the Spirit . . .?' (3:3); 'Does God give you his Spirit?' (3:5)—which climax with the statement, 'God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father"' (4:6). The key element in Christian conversion is the presence of the eschatological Spirit dynamically experienced (3:2–5; 4:6) which is the indispensable proof to these Gentile Christians that they are already the sons of God.

²⁹ Cranfield, *Romans* Vol.1, 388.

ing the expression *pneuma huiiothesias*, would appear to be stating that there can be no possibility of adopted sons of God without that same Spirit. Adoption and the Spirit are mutually dependent and intertwined aspects of the Christian's experience of salvation rather than separate developments in the Christian's life. This may be further strengthened by what Paul says to the Galatian churches when he employs the distinctive phrase the Spirit of his Son (Gal. 4:6) to drive home the point that just as it is impossible to think of the Spirit divorced from the Sonship of Christ so it is equally inconceivable to think of the Spirit apart from the Christian's adoption as son.

Given the fact that the era of the *pneuma* is the same era as that of adoption this brings an accompanying moral responsibility upon the Roman church. It is to this we now turn.

III. Adoption, the Spirit, and the ethical³⁰ imperative

In Rom. 8:12–17 Paul's argument is a very closely reasoned one (cf. connecting particles at the beginning vv. 12–14). Having previously stated that the 'Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you' (v. 11) there is now an obligation upon the Roman Christians (v. 12). In a pericope full of moral overtones the apostle clearly spells out what this means but does so in negative terms. We begin with v. 14 because structurally it is not only the 'nuclear verse of the whole of Romans'³¹ but is central to the apostle's discussion on adoption as well as being the locus for the twin aspects of sonship and the Spirit.

This is the first time Paul uses the description 'sons of God' in the letter and it represents an important advance (in terms of relationship to God) to anything he has stated previously (cf. Rom. 4 where believers were spoken of as 'children of Abraham'). This expression would no doubt have meant something to all his readers, Gentiles (Acts 17:28) but especially Jews for whom this was a biblical title for Israel (cf. Ex. 4:22; Deut. 14:1; Is. 1:2–4; 30:9; 43:6; Hos. 1:10; 11:1 etc.). Also, Israel as God's son was led (cf. Ex. 15:13; Ps. 78:52; 136:16; 143:10; Is. 63:14; Jer. 2:6; Hos. 11:1; Am. 2:10) where obedience as children who shared God's holy nature was expected (Deut. 14:2). Failure to do so would result in divine displeasure (cf. Jer. 3:19–4:4). But in this title there is also an allusion to the sonship of Jesus (cf. esp. vv. 3 and 29) a point confirmed in v. 15 by his addressing God as *abba* (Mk. 14:36).

³⁰ Although Romans 8 is not normally considered to contain ethical teaching (Rom. 12 is usually considered in this light) G. Bornkamm points out, 'Rom. 8 deals expressly with the countermovements to the thoughts and endeavours of the "flesh" ... and clearly outlines Paul's "ethics" '; see *Paul* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 156.

³¹ J. J. Van Rensburg, 'The Children of God in Romans 8,' *Neot.* 15 (1981), 139–179.

Now this same title 'sons of God' who are 'led by the Spirit' is one which is attributed to the Christian.³² But what is the 'leading' to which the apostle refers?

The verb *agesthai* (v. 14) has been translated by some as 'driven by' the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 2: 12) and is the language of 'enthusiasts'. Therefore to translate it as 'be led by' is to weaken the meaning. But Käsemann gives no reason to suggest that the problem of the 'enthusiasts' in Corinth was also a problem facing the church at Rome. Moreover, the lexical evidence is lacking because nowhere³³ is this verb translated 'drive'. Being led by the Spirit is not restricted to a few ecstasies but is instead a typical experience of all of God's children. The 'leading' which Paul has in mind must be seen within the context of what he has stated previously, namely, 'to put to death the misdeeds (*praxeis*) of the body (*soma*)' (v. 13b). If the presence of the former word by itself does not provide any pejorative significance the inclusion of the noun *soma* does. The latter is probably, 'a stylistic variant for the overloaded *sarx*' and the misdeeds in mind, 'are the actions which express undue dependence on satisfying merely human appetites and ambitions'.³⁴ Being led by the Spirit is not a sporadic event; rather it is an habitual experience where 'the misdeeds of the body' need to be continually (*thanatoute*)³⁵ put to death. The new energy to help God's sons to do so is, 'by the Spirit' (v. 13b). Thus, the 'leading' of the Spirit' which Paul has in mind is not to be simplistically understood as guidance per se or decision-making. On the contrary, it is an expression pregnant with moral content where Spirit-led-sons-of-God have the responsibility to daily starve the flesh (NIV 'sinful nature'). In fact the verb in v. 13b is much stronger in that God's sons are to show a certain ruthlessness towards all sin they are to kill (*thanatoute*) it off continually. Thus, for Paul there is a clear difference between acknowledging that one is a son of God and acting like a child of God 'The ethical implications of Adoption are obvious. A "son of God" must

³² There is a close nexus of ideas here namely, sonship, the Spirit and obedience. All of these relate to Israel, Jesus and now the Christian. Whereas Israel as God's son was led but failed to obey, Jesus as the Son of God (also 'led by the Spirit' [*anechthe hupo tou pneumatos*] Matt 4:1; also Lk, 4:1 *egeto en to pneumati*) had his sonship (cf. Matt. 4:1-10 esp. vv. 3, 6) authenticated by obedience to the Father. Jesus in his hour of struggle and temptation is the 'son' Israel never proved to be. Now Christians as the sons of God struggle against the flesh as they too are led by the same Spirit.

³³ E.g. BAGD does not include 'drive' as a possible meaning for the verb *ago*. Rather it has this passage under 'be led/allow oneself to be led' which is very different to 'be driven'.

³⁴ Dunn, *Romans* Vol. 1 38A, 449.

³⁵ As Cranfield states, 'The daily, hourly putting to death of the schemings and enterprises of the sinful flesh by means of the Spirit is a matter of being led . . . by the Spirit' (*Romans*, Vol. 1, 395).

behave in a manner worthy of his august descent, and only those who behave so are truly "sons". . . . only as men behave like God can they really prove themselves to be the sons of God'.³⁶ Thus, if adoption is an eschatological blessing (cf. Rom. 8:14, 16 with v. 23), then here we have what could be more appropriately termed the ethics of the eschaton—the duty of all of God's sons to live circumspectly in the last days. If there is an allusion to the sonship of Jesus then the Christian's sonship involves no less obedience than was demanded or required of Him. The ethical note struck by Paul means that the Spirit is the moral force for daily living. More than this, the indwelling of the power of the Spirit is to transform the human being through Jesus Christ, God's Son. In brief, the apostle is delineating the new life which comes from God in Christ through the Spirit changing the human persona into the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). A similar ethical note is made in Eph. 1:4–5 which, taken with vv. 12–14, means that God has elected the church for that full and glorious sonship that will result from our resurrection-transformation into the *eikon* of God's Son (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42–49; Phil. 3:21; Col. 3:4).

IV. Adoption as sons and the Spirit's witness

The verses which concern us here are vv. 15–16, the punctuation of which is often disputed. There are three ideas which the apostle conveys, namely, that Christians have received the Spirit of adoption (v. 15a), that they cry 'Abba, Father' (v. 15b) and that the Spirit himself bears witness to/with our spirit that we are the children of God' (v. 16). How these three ideas are related is a matter of debate. Two main arguments have been posited. 'Abba, Father' could either be linked with the preceding clause giving the sense 'We have received the Spirit of adoption enabling us to cry "Abba, Father"' or it could be attached to the next phrase giving the meaning 'When we cry "Abba, Father" it is the Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are the children of God'. Probably the second³⁷ is to be preferred since Paul's thinking has progressed from the Christian's relationship and attitude to God (ie. no longer slaves but sons) to the expression of that filial relationship through the witness of the Spirit. The Spirit brings home to the Christian the awareness of his new filial disposition. The cry emitted by the newly adopted son has also been variously interpreted. Some³⁸ take it as an utterance in unusual circumstances of religious revival when an extraordinary sense of liberty is enjoyed.

³⁶ L. H. Marshall, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (London: MacMillan, 1960), 259.

³⁷ F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit* (Exeter: Paternoster, rep. 1977), 208.

³⁸ C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Fontana Books, 1959), 239.

Others³⁹ regard the cry as a loud proclamation in prayer either within the context of public or private worship. Still others⁴⁰ take the double combination 'Abba, Father' as an example of glossolalic prayer. And still others⁴¹ understand it as a reference to the Lord's prayer. In spite of its brevity this cry could be a complete prayer.⁴² If it is, then clearly it is an extemporaneous one where the Christian emits an ejaculatory response of intense emotion, where the assurance of being God's child and having God as one's Father strikes home. The word *abba*⁴³ shows how a term which was used by the Lord (Mk. 14:36)⁴⁴ found its way into the Greek-speaking churches in Paul's day and probably did so because it was remembered as such.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, when Jesus addresses God as *abba* there is a uniqueness and distinction between his relationship with his Father and that of the disciples.⁴⁶

³⁹ F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961), 214.

⁴⁰ E. Käsemann, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 227.

⁴¹ E.g. E. Best, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge; Cambridge University Press, 1967), 94; see also Cranfield, *Romans*, 400, and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Tyndale Press, rep. 1966), 166.

⁴² E. Best, *Romans*, 94; see also E. O. Obeng, ' "Abba, Father": The Prayer of the Sons of God', *Exp. Tim.* 99 (1988), 365.

⁴³ D. Wenham draws out parallels between the Gethsemane account of Mk. 14:36 and Romans 8; see Paul: *Follower of Jesus*, 276ff. On the other hand M. D'Angelo concludes that *abba* 'cannot be attributed to Jesus with any certainty. It may have originated or been of special importance in the Syrian churches . . . Second, "father" or "my father" was used as an address to God and as an epithet for God in antique Judaism. . . . as an address to God (it) cannot be shown to originate with Jesus, to be particularly important to his teaching, or even to have been used by him' (' "Abba", Father: Imperial Theology and the Jesus Tradition' *JBL* 111 (1992), 611-630. D'Angelo however fails to recognise the overwhelming evidence in the gospel traditions of the application of 'father' to God (Matt. 45 times, Mark. 5 times, Luke. 17 and John. 118 times).

⁴⁴ In spite of the overly sentimental ('daddy' is probably too familiar whereas 'dear father' may be nearer the meaning) associations given to the term *abba* Morris cautions, 'we should reflect that the head of the family was an august figure in first century society (the Roman paterfamilias still had the right to put members of his household to death even if the right was used rarely)', *Romans*, 316. C. F. D. Moule rightly points out, 'Jesus uses the *abba* address to offer to God his complete obedience. The intimate word conveys not a casual sort of familiarity but the deepest trustful obedience' (*The Holy Spirit* [London: Mowbrays, 1978], 29). In Jewish life the word *abba* was usually how children (although not exclusively so; cf. E. Haenchen, *Der Weg Jesu* [Berlin, Töpelmann, 1966], 492-494) addressed their fathers and it may well be that it was too familiar an expression to use when addressing God. J. Barr is of the opinion that *abba* is not children's speech but that of adults ('Abba Isn't Daddy' *JTS* 39 [1988], 28-47).

⁴⁵ It is worth bearing in mind that Jesus would hardly have used *abba* in an overfamiliar sense like 'daddy' especially on the eve of the greatest challenge of his earthly life, the paschal event (Mark. 14:36).

⁴⁶ I. H. Marshall writes, ' . . . no saying has been preserved in which Jesus linked the disciples with himself so that together they could say, "Our Father". The wording of Matt. 6:9 is for use by disciples only, and John 20:17 (if its evidence is permitted) explicitly distinguishes between "my Father" and "your Father", thus bringing out a distinction

Another point of contention is that of the witness of the Spirit—does the Spirit testify with or to our spirit that we are the children of God? The verb *summartureo* could be taken either way. Cranfield⁴⁷ prefers the latter and asks, 'What standing has our spirit in this matter? Of itself it surely has no right at all to testify to our being sons of God.' But the compound verb *summartureo*⁴⁸ with the dative expression would more naturally mean 'bears witness with our spirit' as two witnesses linked together indicating that we are God's sons.⁴⁹ The Spirit strikes a chord with the believer's spirit indicating to him that he has come home. The Christian is no mere robot in these affairs and, what is more, 'the Spirit has not come to "take over" . . . so that our own human responsibility is diminished'.⁵⁰ This dual witness can also be substantiated by the fact that in the Old Testament two witnesses were always required to establish the truth of any statement (eg. Deut. 19:15). That the apostle Paul was aware of the principle of multiple witnesses is clear from 2 Cor. 13:1. If so, this may have important implications as far as the background to Paul's adoption motif is concerned because 'the witness-bearing function of the Spirit . . . in Rom. viii. 16 . . . may suggest that Paul . . . had in mind the Roman form of adoption with the Spirit sent as the witness in the formal act of adoptio'.⁵¹ This is because adoption in Roman society was a public act performed before witnesses who could be asked to give testimony to the fact that a person had been adopted.⁵² In the event of the death of the adoptive father the validity of an adoption could be called into question by the 'natural' heirs. At such times the testimony of witnesses that a formal act of adoption had taken place was crucial.

⁴⁶ (Cont'd) implicit elsewhere. This suggests a difference in the status of Jesus and his disciples which is not accidental'; see 'The Divine Sonship of Jesus' *Int.* 21 (1967), 87-103.

⁴⁷ Cranfield, *Romans* Vol. 1, 403.

⁴⁸ This is but one example of nine compound verbs within the space of fourteen verses.

⁴⁹ W. D. Stacey writes, 'in Rom. 8.16 Paul invokes the Spirit of God and the Christian's spirit, as separate witnesses to the sonship of the believer, and the distinction between the two is patent'; see *The Pauline View of Man* (London: MacMillan, 1956), 32. Also see G. S. Hendry, *The Holy Spirit in Christian Theology*, (London: SCM, 1957), 96-117.

⁵⁰ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 569.

⁵¹ Dunn, *Galatians*, 217 and 219. J. D. Hester states 'all the elements present in the Roman form of adoption are present in Paul's adoption metaphor'; see *Paul and the Concept of Inheritance: A Contribution to the Understanding of Heilgeschichte* (SJT Occas. Papers No.14), 60-62. It is also instructive to note that Paul was clearly a Roman citizen (Acts 22:22ff.) and he only uses this motif in letters addressed to churches in Rome or in Roman colonies. But whilst the most likely background to Paul's adoption term is Roman Law the Old Testament background needs to be taken into consideration as well.

⁵² Scott however dismisses this aspect of the Roman legal act of adoption (in our view without serious consideration); see *Adoption as Sons*, 177 n.199.

In short, the Spirit is sent by the Father to assure men of the new position of sonship which they have in Christ. In the New Testament the Spirit's chief work is reiterative rather than innovative.⁵³ In other words, the Spirit always acts upon the basis of what Christ has already done and Paul has already struck an important soteriological note in Rom. 8:3 (cf. Gal. 4:5). Thus, to take adoption out of its Christological⁵⁴ environment is to misinterpret and miss the primary thrust of what Paul is saying.

V. Conclusion

For Paul the gift of the Spirit (Rom. 8) has eclipsed the old era of the Law (Rom. 7). This is in keeping with the eschatological promises in the Old Testament and other Jewish literature. Adoption was also regarded by the Old Testament and rabbinic writers as an eschatological blessing. Paul, because of his Jewish background, would have been well aware of these promises and, by using the *hapax legomenon*, *pneuma huiiothesias*, shows that the eschatological gifts of the Spirit and adoption are inextricably linked together. But for Paul the end times have already arrived and the Spirit brings the moral demand for God's sons to live circumspectly in the interval between the 'now' and the 'not-yet'. Thus there is the command for all God's children to live in a manner which befits those who belong to the divine family. In so doing they are emulating Jesus their Elder Brother. This same Spirit also witnesses with the believer's spirit of the reality of their new filial disposition a sonship entered into only on the basis of the work of Christ.

Abstract

The apostle Paul's ambivalence towards the Law (Rom. 7) is investigated against the many pneumatological statements in Rom. 8 and the suggestion is made that the eschatological Spirit—often ignored or overlooked—could be one solution to the subject of Paul and the Law.

⁵³ T. Small writes, 'The business of the Holy Spirit is not to make . . . sons, still less to make God our Father, but rather to reveal and realise in us the sonship that has its whole basis in the work of Christ'; see *The Forgotten Father: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Gospel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), 147. Similarly H. B. Swete writes, 'The Spirit of the Son is sent into the hearts of the adopted sons . . . It does not make them sons, for they are such by their union with the Incarnate Son, but it makes them conscious of their sonship'; see *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 204.

⁵⁴ For a treatment of adoption as a christological blessing see the author's article 'The Characteristics of Paul's Adoptive-Sonship (HUIOTHESIA) Motif'. *Irish Biblical Studies* 17 (1995), 62–74.

Not only does the OT and Jewish literature of the period look forward to a time when the Spirit would replace the Torah as a way of life but adoption too is depicted as an eschatological blessing and Paul, aware of such promises, brings the two gifts together in the phrase *pneuma huiiothesias*. For Paul the era of the *pneuma* is also the era of adoption and—now that the last days have arrived—the apostle wants his readers to be in no doubt as to the moral responsibilities upon them as God's children. Thus, the expression 'to be led by the Spirit' (v. 14) is best understood against the immediately preceding phrase 'put to death the misdeeds of the body' (v. 13b). The dual testimony of the Spirit *with* the adopted son's spirit not only assures the believer of their new position of sonship but may also point to contemporary practice (not excluding the OT) as a more likely milieu from which Paul got his adoption term.

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