

“Orphans of the Storm”
November 14, 2010
Grove Presbyterian Church

Paul writes theologically. The Letter to the Romans is his statement of faith to the church at Rome, introducing himself that he might come and work there a while.

Paul sees life as a crossroad. Well, maybe more like a ‘Y’ in the road. You come to the intersection and you can travel either way. You have to choose. Left or right?

To the right, it is what Paul calls, “living by the flesh.” Obligated, indebted to the flesh-time. By this, he means, figuratively, the sinful life, the life motivated the way of the world, the neediness of the self. Feed me!

It is a choice. Though, you could choose better. For taking this fork in the road means death, the spirit of slavery, a life of fear. You chose the world; the world now owns you.

But if you choose the left fork, heading toward the light, you live by the Spirit, obligated, indebted, indeed, grateful. It is the path called by Paul as the spirit of adoption. Literally, the word means coming into son-ship, being granted that status. And it was done in the Greek and Roman world, as well as the Hebrew. The old Roman man has no heirs, no sons, to leave all that he accumulated and labored for over his years. So he looks to his faithful servant. He elevates his servant from slave to freeborn. He realizes for his servant what the servant could never imagine possible. He makes him his legal son, puts his ring on his finger, and announces to all his friends, “This is my son. Treat him as such. He gets it all!”

A perfect image for Paul of how those who are illegitimate, abandoned, beyond the covenant (such as the gentiles), become children of God. The spiritual bond is as valid as bloodline. The Holy Spirit itself witnesses this contract. And if children of God, they become brothers and sisters of God’s Son, named Jesus. We become heirs of grace. And with Jesus, we too now – once strangers and outsiders – become beloved, free to call God, “Daddy, Abba.”

It is the fork in the road formula:

Living by the flesh = death = spirit of slavery = fear

or

*Living by the spirit = life = spirit of adoption = children of God = heirs = get to call
God, Daddy*

Family is salvation.

Listen:

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him

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For Paul, he’s writing spiritual truth. Theology.

For orphans and too many children of the world, what he describes is social fact

The movie, *Slum Dog Millionaire*, pretty accurately captures their situation.

So too *Orphans of the Storm*, by DW Griffith. Two sisters, abandoned and orphaned, caught up, abused, vulnerable by the schemes of wealthy men.

We think slavery is an evil of the past. Sadly, no. There are more slaves now than ever before in the history of the world.

Ah, progress! Civilization, ho!

We won’t even go to the dying rooms in China for those not anatomically perfect.

For orphans, slavery is a very real option.

Ah, but what about orphanages? Thank God for some of them, but for most, well now, what happens when the little ones now adolescents have to leave the orphanage?

Goodbye. And the door closes.

What’s next? For most boys, they have a few options: begging, crime, sex trade, cannon fodder for the Army.

If girls, well, pretty much only one: sex slavery.

These are some of the kids our friend and neighbor Woody Wolf is working with through his music ministry in the Ukraine. Now that I think about it, maybe it’s about time our mission budget reflects our pride and hope in Woody and people like him.

We've seen some of this too. Come to Managua. It can throw you seeing the poverty and desperation. Children passed out on the curb. And then it painfully dawns on them that most of the world is like Managua. We in the United States are the exception.

*Fat valley of pain. Fat valley of pain inside.  
Loving you is what I was made for.*

For Paul, he's writing spiritual truth. Theology.

For orphans, what he describes is social fact. The spirit of adoption means life. The alternative is frightening.

I weary of humanity.

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*Sometimes I feel
Like a motherless child :
Sometimes I feel
Like a motherless child
A Long Way From Home :
True Believer
A Long Way From Home*

A rather challenging black theologian wrote a fine book about the slavery and suffering that inspired so many of such spirituals and blues:

"Thus it is the loss of community that constitutes the major burden. Suffering is not too much to bear, if there are brother and sisters to go down into the valley to pray with you." [The Spirituals and the Blues, by James Cone]

The theologian's name? James Cone. Took a class from him at Seminary.

*O children, let's go down, let's go down, let's go down,
O children, let's go down, down in the valley to pray...*

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[Drop every 14 seconds a marble into the pitcher on the pulpit]

Each marble represents a new orphan in the world. An orphan every 14 seconds. Every day 6,000 children become orphans. That's a Danville of Orphans every day. Every days times 365 days.

Now look at the bulletin and the parish news. We did a word count of the bulletin. There are 1,874 words in your hands. Hold that bulletin. Each word in your hands represents an orphan who will have died during the hour we have worshipped this morning.

Every 2 seconds an orphan dies of malnutrition. 30 every minute.

God, it is said, does have a plan for solving all this. It's called the church.

***Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. --I John 3: 2***

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I remember a powerful Rod Serling's Night Gallery episode called, "The Escape Route."

November 8m, 1969. The plot turned on a Nazi concentration camp commander escaped to Argentina. Haunted by his choices and deeds, he finds escape in an Art Museum. He goes each day and sits in front of a painting of a man in a rowboat fishing in the Alps. In Twilight Zone fashion, he enters the picture. He becomes the man in the painting. Then comes the Rod Serling twist. He's discovered and runs. He decides to escape into the pleasant painting. He does, but failed to notice the museum switched paintings during the night. The painting he enters and becomes is that of Jesus crucified.

For too many children there is no escape, either real or imaginary.

Unless we Christians step up. I am so proud of, grateful for, and indebted to the many parents at Grove who have, following the example of suffering God, practiced the spirit of adoption.

There is an organization called Lifesong for Orphans. For several years now, Bob Marks and I have been trying to get Presbytery to outsource Presbytery's adoption fund to Lifesong for the sake of increasing the ministry and the chance for adoptions. We are resolved that if Presbytery diddles on this much longer, we at Grove will just go ahead and do it.

Lifesong's pledge is as follows:

We pledge...."Our Children" will have:

- ▲ No want for food, clothing, medical care, or shelter.
- ▲ Fundamental (foundational) Christian training and discipleship.
- ▲ A quality education to provide a foundation for the future.
- ▲ Continued love and support as they transition into adult living.

What else can we do?

We claim the same pledge for the children and youth in our community needing attention, love, discipline. Family is salvation, whether by spirit or blood. Some of these are going on now at Grove but we can do more and do it better.

- Read at the Elementary Schools
- Help out our single parents
- Tutor
- Foster Care support
- Support an overseas orphanage
- Bill Fait helping send 4 kids to Camp Krislund who never would get the chance
- Big Brother Big Sister (background check link is available now)
- And I still haven't forgotten the dream of building our own orphanage here in town. It is far more effective to help the children receive what all children deserve before they become troubled teenagers.

Oh, yes, and if I were young with the correct kind of skills, like medicine, you could forget me worrying about which hospital would want me after my residency or how to pay off my loans.

You couldn't stop me from joining up with 'Doctor without Borders' or contacting our own church headquarters as to where could they use me to help the children.

Well, I'm not that old. I might yet. Maybe Woody needs some help.