



Romans 8:15; 9:26; Galatians 3:26

The Adoption of Believers

One of the most interesting examples of adoption in history has to do with the Emperor Claudius. Claudius adopted Nero to set up the political intrigue to allow Nero to succeed him as Emperor of Rome. The two men were not in any sense blood relatives. Nero wished to cement the alliance by marrying Claudius' daughter Octavia. Remember Nero and Octavia were in no sense blood relations, yet, in the eyes of the law, they were brother and sister. Before they could marry, the Roman senate had to pass special legislation to allow the marriage to take place.

Our own adoption practices are patterned after the Roman laws.

ADOPTION IN THE ROMAN LAW

Adoption was the legal action by which a person takes into his family a child not his own with the purpose of treating him as and giving him all the privileges of his own natural child. An adopted child was legally entitled to all rights and privileges of a natural-born child.

Roman legal practice

According to the Roman legal system the person who was adopted into a family gained all the legal rights of a legitimate son in the new family, but he lost all the rights, privileges and responsibilities in his old family. By becoming a member of the new family he gained all the rights of his new father's estate. He was now an equal with the other sons and daughters in his new family. He was a co-heir with them according to the law. He was regarded as a new person who had a new life in a new family.

Another wonderful thing about the Roman law was that the old life of the adopted son was completely wiped out. All of his debts were cancelled. His past now had nothing to do with him. He was in a new relationship with a new family.

Jewish life

In the Old Testament God adopted the people of Israel as His own unique people. They enjoyed a special relationship as the chosen people of God. They were God's people by adoption (Romans 9:4, 26).

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Why did God choose Israel and not Babylon, Egypt or Assyria? They were much larger and more powerful than Israel. Deuteronomy 7:6-8 tells us it was an act of God's grace. God told Moses: "For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). God chose Israel as an act of love. Grace is written all over that choice.

Moreover, the apostle Paul tells us the Holy Spirit is the witness to our adoption into the family of God. Have you ever wondered how you got into the family of God?

CHRISTIAN'S PRIVILEGE IN THE FAMILY OF GOD

Two things happened in our relationship to God's family the moment we believed on Christ as our Savior. The believing sinner, who is not a natural son or daughter of God, is *positioned* as an adult son in the family of God. This is a legal action and position. It is like a formal adoption or the legal placing of a child in a new family. Please keep in mind this is not the same as regeneration. It is the act of God, which places the believer in His family as an adult son. At the same time we are told in the Scriptures the believer is spiritually born into the family of God. This is the new birth or regeneration. In this sense we are as a child who needs to grow and develop. The believing sinner in his position is one of full privilege in the family of God; his practice, however, involves growth in grace and knowledge of Christ.

The believer is placed as an adult son in the family of God.

A believer under grace is placed as an adopted son in the family of God. When the Apostle Paul speaks of our spiritual adoption by God he uses the word *huiosthesia* (*huios* - a son) (*thesis* - a placing), to place as a son. It is the place given to one to whom it does not belong. Galatians 3:26 says, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." He is an adult son of God. It is used only in reference to a believer in this age of grace.

Adoption put the emphasis on the position we have with God as His full grown children. This spiritual adoption takes place at the time one is saved and thus becomes a child of God. The one thus placed has at once all the privilege and liberty of a full grown person. Moreover, it also imposes on the believer the responsibilities of belonging to full maturity. Whatever God declares true of any believer, He addresses to all believers. Because we have all been adopted God expects all believers to behave accordingly. Every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and has the same enabling. Our position as a full-grown child of God enables us to live the Christian life. There is no other way to live it. God doesn't just save us and turn us loose on the world. He saves us and indwells us with His presence and power so He can live His life through us.

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When a lost sinner becomes a Christian he enters into the very family of God. He does not deserve it. God in His amazing love, grace and mercy has taken the lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinner and adopted him into His own family, so that the debts are canceled and the glory inherited. Jesus told Nicodemus a Jewish religious leader, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." There are no exceptions. We all must be born into the family of God.

The actual placement of the believer into the family of God is by this spiritual birth. This is the work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit. As a result of our spiritual birth we become "little children" (*teknon*). The believer's relation to God as a child results from the new birth. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12, 13). Because of this spiritual birth we are to *grow* and become mature in our spiritual life.

What does adoption teach us?

God, in His mercy, has brought us into His absolute possession. The old life has no more rights over us; God has an absolute right to us. The past is canceled and its debts are wiped out; we began a new life with God and become heirs of all His riches. Since that is true, we become joint heirs with Jesus Christ, God's unique Son. That which Christ inherits, we also inherit. Since Christ was raised to life and glory, we also inherit that life and glory.

We are no longer members of Adam's family. We have a new father. We have a new head of the family. God the Father loves us and wants us to become members of His family. All of our inheritance from Adam with its sin and death has been cancelled out and we are now members of another family. God is now our Father and Jesus is our big brother! What a privilege and honor to be members of His family.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF ADOPTION FOR US

God the Father "predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ."

Salvation is not some accident or afterthought on the part of God. The accent falls on God's eternal plan. God's purposes are rooted in His eternal nature. God is a God of love who seeks a people for Himself. Election is God's grace at work resulting in "saints," "holy ones," "set apart ones." He adopted people into His family through Jesus Christ. Adoption is family imagery. This adoption is based upon the death of Jesus Christ for our sins and His resurrection. "He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:5-6).

God has determined before hand that those who believe in Christ will be adopted into His family and conformed to His Son. God's eternal purpose is that we have the very character and likeness of His Son, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29).

God in love chose us to be His children (Ephesians 1:4) based on the good pleasure of His perfect will (vv. 5, 9, 11). God's motive was to glorify Himself (v. 14).

God's placement of His children in the Body of Christ does not relieve man of his responsibility to believe the gospel.

gospel.

It is very important to note that nothing in Ephesians chapter one focuses on individuals; everything in the text focuses on those who are in Christ. Election takes place in Him (Ephesians 1:4) and through him (1:5). Talk about security of the believer! Here is where you find it. We are born with a craving to be wanted and loved unconditionally. We have a need for a sense of belongingness. We need someone who will take the initiative to love and accept us for who we are. God the Father has done this. He sent Jesus to come and die for us on the cross. The Bible says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

The Holy Spirit places the believing sinner in the family of God as an adult person (Romans 8:15).

This new relationship with God gives us freedom. We are no longer slaves. "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15).

The Holy Spirit delivers man from a terrible spirit —"the spirit of bondage." The bondage is fear. Man is gripped by the bondage of fear. There is a cosmic fear in all mankind outside of Christ. Man is not delivered from this terrible bondage until he places his trust in Christ.

The Holy Spirit delivers the believer from the bondage of fear. How? He actually adopts the believer as a son (child) of God. The Holy Spirit bears witness that we are the children of God. The Holy Spirit quickens our hearts with the perfect knowledge and the complete confidence that we are children of God. He sheds abroad in our hearts the love of God. He spreads the knowledge that God loves us and He spreads it through our being. The Bible says, "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Rom. 5:5), who "sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (II Cor. 1:22; cf. 5:5). "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation —having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13).

There is an intimate relationship with the Spirit of God (v. 15b-16).

The believer receives this "Spirit of adoption" —this sense of consciousness, awareness, and knowledge — that he is a child of God. The indwelling Spirit gives the realization of this sonship to the believer's present experience. Paul reminds us in Galatians 4:6-7, "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God."

The Holy Spirit enables the child of God to call God, Father. The Holy Spirit testifies to our human spirit that we are children of God. Our own spirit has found peace with God and testifies to the fact that we are his children, but the voice with which it speaks is the Spirit of God. Ours is a Spirit —energized spirit that gives witness to our being a child of God. At the present time we have only a foretaste of what it will be like when Christ returns in His glory because the full manifestation of our sonship awaits the resurrection of the saints.

The Spirit gives access into God's presence.

The believer has access to God because he has been adopted as His child. The believer is a child of God with all the privileges of sonship, of access to God, of entering into His presence anytime and any place. This relationship enables the believer to break the bondage of fear.

My daughters have always been able to gain access to my presence. I have enjoyed an open loving response to them quick to lay aside whatever I am doing to give them my wholehearted attention. When our oldest daughter was in high school she came by my office one afternoon and made herself an appointment through my secretary! She had called the office earlier and each time she called I was busy with someone. She told my secretary she wanted her own appointment with her father. Lois quickly gave her a time slot before someone else got it. We have that kind of relationship with our heavenly Father, but we don't have to go through someone else to get it! He is never in a hurry, never too busy, never preoccupied, never any chain of command, etc. Our heavenly Father reaches out to us ready to give us that sense of belongingness.

We are able to enter the presence of God, to lay our fear before God, to cry out "Father, Father help me!" Cf. Ephesians 3:12; I Peter 3:12

God's love for the adopted Child is as great as God's sovereign power. God will do everything for the believer who is His adopted child.

We wait for our complete manifestation of adoption (Romans 8:23).

"And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body" (Romans 8:23). This is future and only when we have received our glorified bodies at the Second Coming of Jesus will we possess all that our adoption as God's children involves.

We have an eternal inheritance with our older brother because we have been adopted into His family. We are joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17). "If children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him." We shall inherit all that God has and all that Christ is and has. We are part of the family! We are given the privilege of sharing in all things with the Son of God.

Everything we have is His, also. Every member has responsibilities within the family.

Are you a member of God's family by adoption? Have you been born spiritually into His family?

If you need help in becoming a Christian here is [A Free Gift for You](#).

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