

The Blessing of Adoption

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[0 : 0 0] You know, I've always had a great deal of respect and admiration for the infomercial.! And this is something that's in the US. I hope that there is something similar to this in the UK.

But in the US there's something called the infomercial. It takes a 30 minute block of time on the television and it doesn't actually show anything entertaining. It is just one long commercial.

And what I find so interesting about these things is that there's a certain degree of rhetorical prowess that goes into an infomercial. It's like a street hawker who's selling his wares but instead of being in the marketplace he's decided to set up right outside the movie theater just for the extra challenge. There's actual entertainment just a click away but they're trying to grab your attention sometimes even for a whole 30 minutes when you could click away at any given moment. And so they have to try to grab your attention. And sometimes when I was young I'd sneak downstairs early trying to see cartoons early watching some Tom and Jerry but the programming at that point would just be infomercials. But sometimes I would just sit there and watch the infomercials. I'd actually be captivated by them because there's something hypnotic about them. You're sitting there and you're watching the Boneflex Gym Stairmaster 3000 whatever set of knives they're selling and they're trying to one-up themselves for 30 minutes when they're only selling this one product. And so what they do is they take a knife. They show you a knife. They show you this is the most wonderful knife. It can cut through anything.

It has incredible craftsmanship. And then they say this could be yours for \$19.99 and they put it on the table. And then they keep going. They say you know you need a paring knife. No kitchen is complete without a paring knife. And then they show that. And then they put that on the table. And then they just keep bringing out the goods. They say you know here's a cleaver. Here's a turkey baster. Here's something else you need. And they lay it all out on the table. And the way they stereotypically end is at the very end of the commercial they say we can't do this all day. But if you call right now we'll double the offer absolutely free. All of this could be yours. You know and as a six-year-old child I'm ready to break open my piggy bank. I'm ready to invest in culinary equipment because I don't need it but I see the value.

And what I think Paul's doing here in Ephesians is rather similar. And by that I don't mean that Paul is some sort of sleazy infomercial salesman. Paul's not after your wallet but he is after your heart and he is after your voices. He is absolutely convinced that the salvation we have in Jesus Christ is the greatest thing in this world and it is the greatest thing in this universe. There is nothing that we can conceive of that compares with that salvation. And he has 12 verses going on and on about it. And he is just piling up blessing after blessing, grace upon grace. And he's trying to get us to see that the riches we have in Jesus Christ are truly magnificent. And we've already gone over verses 3 and 4 and he's opened up with a big blessing. He's opened up with the blessing of election. How God's grace is shown to us and that he chose us before the foundation of the world. There was nothing in us that was desirable but God still loved us and showed his love to us. And he's even now molding us to be holy and blameless in his sight. You know that's a real blessing. That is a powerful blessing. And we as Presbyterians appreciate a predestination and election. That's something we talk about. But here he says, you know, if you can't believe the wonders of the blessing of election, just wait until you see what election gets you. It gets you the blessing of adoption. You know, this blessing here in verses 5 and 6 is the blessing of adoption. And it is not playing second fiddle to what has come before. It is just as marvelous as and as impressive. And so what I want us to do today is I want us to take our love of God, that all-important metric of how we are doing in our Christian lives, and I want us to clothe our love of God with greater and greater reasons for that love as Paul is doing here. And what I want us to do is see how adoption should make us sing better to our heavenly Father. And to do that today, I have three simple headings for you. What, how, and why. What, how, and why. Very simple headings. But I should warn you that it's a little front-loaded, so don't get too concerned when you see how long the first point takes. We'll make it out of here in time for lunch.

[5 : 23] But here, let's see, look at this first point. You know, what. The what of this passage is that we are adopted as sons. Paul here is announcing that Christians are adopted by sons, as sons, by God himself, and that would have been astounding to all the Jews who were listening. Now, this is something you may not quite realize, but if you go to the first five books of the Bible, and you go to the Torah, and it lays out the Mosaic Law, if you read it, it has all sorts of ins and outs describing all sorts of things. There's all sorts of ceremonial rights. There's all sorts of laws about all sorts of things. But there's no actual mechanism in the Mosaic Law to take someone from one family, bring them into your own, and give them your own name. That actually doesn't exist in the Mosaic Law.

There's no mechanism for that. The families have to be distinct, partly because of the way the land gets inherited. But, you know, we see here that adoption is a very small, minor theme in the Old Testament. You know, individual Jews are not supposed to call upon God as their particular heavenly Father. You know, the Jews could list off their blessings that they have, and they could say, we have the law, we have the prophets, we have the temple, we are God's covenant people. All of those are great blessings. But none of them say, God is my Father. You know, in a certain sense, we can see in certain passages that God is like a Father to the nation of Israel. Or He may act as a Father to the kings of Israel. But the ordinary person in the pew in the synagogue wasn't just supposed to call out upon God as their Father. When Jesus does that in John 5:18, and He says, God is my Father, everyone picks up stones to stone Him. When you see the Lord's Prayer, and it says, you know, our Father who art in heaven, that is a radical statement. That is something new. You know, each one of us is able, personally, to call upon God as Father, and expect to be heard as sons. And I want you to see there, I'm purposefully using the language of sons. And if you look at whatever Bible translation in front of you, you'll probably see something similar. The NIV says we are, you know, predestined for adoption to sonship. The ESV says we're adopted as sons. Sometimes it says children, but what it's literally saying there is sons. And that's on purpose, by Paul. And that's not because he's some sort of misogynist. He's not trying to say women are second class. He's not trying to dismiss them. It's actually entirely the opposite. You know, Paul is in the ancient world, and in the ancient world there are very real differences between a daughter and a son when it comes to inheritance. You know, sons get the inheritance, the daughters don't.

In the inheritance, the daughters have to be provided for, but they don't get goods themselves. Only the sons get those. And so, when Paul here is saying that we are adopted as sons, he is saying that all Christians, male and female, are adopted as sons. We all have access to all of the rights and privileges of being sons of God and as being heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.

All of us receive every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. It is all ours. We are all adopted as sons in Jesus. We all get it all if we are in Jesus Christ. And I want us to take a moment, and I want us to think on some of the rights and privileges that we have of being sons of God and what a dramatic difference they make in the Christian life. Adoption radically changes your relationship with God.

There is a dramatic change before and after. Before you are adopted, you are an enemy of God. You are actually in rebellion against Him. You are an enemy. You are, what R.C. Sproul says, you know, guilty of cosmic treason before God. But in adoption, you are changed from being a traitor and an enemy of God, and you are brought into the family. You are brought into as close a relationship and as intimate a relationship as we can describe in this world. You are brought into the very family of God. And what that does is it should change your perspective on everything you experience in this life. Because everything that we experience is actually ordained by God. You know, everything is planned by God. And if He is your Father, that should change the way you experience things.

[10:45] All the good things that you experience in this life. Everything. Down to the smallest dollar you receive. Down to simply going outside, enjoying the fresh air, seeing the grass, and seeing the beauty of creation. You are called not simply to receive those things as gifts from some great distant benefactor somewhere. Someone who is showering a gift upon you, but they're very far away. You are called to receive those gifts as if they are from the hand of your Father. Those as a gift from Father to Son.

It is intentional and purposeful for God to shower His blessings upon you. And everything you experience, every good thing you experience, you are called to realize that God is giving it to you. Not simply out of common grace, but out of His grace, the grace that He is showing you as a son and child of God.

But adoption also doesn't simply change the way you perceive the good things that God gives you. It actually also changes the way you perceive the bad things you experience in this life as well.

You know, you also are, you experience, even in your adoption, you sometimes experience the wrath and displeasure of God. Not in the same way that you had experienced before, but it is possible for God to be upset with one of His children. It's in a different way, but still it is possible. But God disciplines His children. He doesn't simply punish them. He disciplines His children. And what we should truly be scared of is the idea that God doesn't discipline us. That is actually the greater curse in Scripture when God just lets us. When God just lets go and just lets someone go off into their own sin.

God disciplines us and brings us closer to Himself, turns us away from our sin, intentionally punishes us in order for us to see that we are to be close to Him and cleave to Him and Him alone.

[12 : 59] You know, that is important for us to see because it brings purpose to our suffering. We are called to see that our God oversees all things and He's doing things for our own good.

And that is a great comfort because what we have is not a harsh Heavenly Father. What we have is the gentlest Heavenly Father. And He cares for us and He cares enough about us to discipline us.

You know, that sometimes means that things are hard. You know, it's hard when you have a Father who's upset with you. It's hard when you have someone close in your family upset with you. It hurts because there's a closeness in that relationship. But we are bound together in Jesus Christ. Our standing before God is secure. God cares for us. And we are called to see that everything that we receive from God, good and bad, is from Him as our Heavenly Father and is actually for His glory and our good.

You know, no matter what, you can actually approach God's throne of grace with boldness. Before adoption, you approach God's throne as a throne of judgment. But with adoption, you approach it as a throne of grace, as someone who has not simply been declared as righteous by the judge, but someone who knows the judge and has access where other people do not.

You know, my father is a seminary professor. He is now retired, but he has spent many, many, many years teaching different students. And what he would always do is he would hand out his phone number to different students on his syllabus. And he'd say, if you're having an issue, you know, 10 years from now in your church and you need some advice, you can call me. And so he actually gets calls fairly often, perhaps even more than he wishes. But he gets calls. And he is happy to help them. But no one who calls my father expects simply just to call once a week, just to catch up, just to kind of enjoy chatting with each other. That can happen every once in a while. But if it happens once a week, you know, for an entire year, it would be a little unusual. They haven't been given that type of access.

[15 : 27] But I'm able to call my father, you know, once a week with absolutely no problem. He is actually eager to hear me. He's actually eager to listen. I can call him at 3 a.m. and he will pick up the phone.

And I have done that before. He's actually surprisingly cheerful about it. That is an access that some student who was in one of his classes somewhere would not receive. The difference between me and one of those students is not that I'm a better student. It's not that. It's that I am a son. I have access to my father that those students do not. I am able to simply call and enjoy him. And our adoption in Jesus Christ should be seen in all sorts of ways, but it should be seen especially in our prayers. You know, you should speak daily with him and lay out all of your cares and concerns before him. You should ask with, about help with whatever you need. You can simply do that.

You can actually pray to God without any cares and concerns. You can simply enjoy him and praise him for who he is, thanking him for what he has done in Jesus Christ. And that's because you should pray to him as your father. You are called to pray to him as he is your heavenly father and you need no other reason for prayer than that. That is a bold access. That is the type of access that the angels wish they had and we have been given in Jesus Christ. We are able to come before our God in prayer and enjoy him in the most intimate of ways whenever we bow our heads. That is a great blessing that we have received in Jesus Christ. But the other aspect of the right and privileges that we have in adoption is also that we are given a new nature. You know, when you're made a child of God, it doesn't just mean that your name changes. It's actually that you change as well. You actually begin to take up a certain family resemblance to God. You know, my father, my brother, you know, we all kind of have a certain family similarity to each other. You can look at our early family photos. You can look at us all when we're a particular age and we look almost identical. The only way that you're able to tell who is who is basically on the, how detailed the camera image is. It's by, you know, what type of camera is used.

And that's a family resemblance. And many of you are related. You have families of your own and you can kind of look and you can see the fingers are similar. You can see the nose is similar. That is a family resemblance. But you may not physically look like God. You may not physically look like Jesus Christ.

And you may not physically look like each other in the room if you're not related to them genetically. But we are called to resemble each other spiritually. And we're called to resemble our brother and our father spiritually as well. You know, when people look at us, that they should say, you know, you remind me of that Jesus I keep hearing about.

[18 : 56] The way you go through life reminds me of what I hear about in the Gospels. It reminds me of what I've heard about him. And that is one of the most impressive testimonies that we can give to others.

That there's this dramatic change that we are brought into the family of God. And the Spirit works in us and makes us more and more like our Savior. So that that family, that spiritual family resemblance begins to be the most important thing about us. Even more than our genetic similarities to our real physical family members. That should be the most powerful thing. That there is a spiritual resemblance.

They should look at us and see our brother Jesus Christ. The Spirit is at work in us, making us more and more like the rest of our family and our brother. That's part of the reason that Paul says some of the things he does. You know, when Paul talks to a church and he says, you're doing something wrong, he basically says, stop doing that. Our family doesn't do that. As part of the family of God, we as Christians do not do that. There's a certain way that we are called to act as Christians.

And Paul wants us to live up to that calling. Act like we are part of our family. This is one of the greatest privileges that we have in Jesus Christ. There's really no other higher privilege in the gospel than adoption. It's the apex of everything. Everything else is part of the mountain range, but adoption is sort of the peak of Mount Everest sticking above the clouds.

Because in adoption, what happens is you get God and God gets you. It is a powerful picture of the rest of the salvation we have in Jesus Christ. That we are brought to God and we are able to enjoy him and he is able to enjoy us. He is our God and we are his people. And we are able to call upon him as a family.

[21 : 03] You know, J.I. Packer was once asked, what is the simplest way that you can describe the gospel? And he thought about it for a long time and he simply said this, it is adoption through propitiation. It is adoption through the sacrifice of Christ that takes away the wrath of God.

That is the simplest way you can describe the gospel. What we are called to do is we're called to work it into our hearts. We are called to understand our adoption in Jesus Christ more and more. And we are called to see that full salvation and rejoice in it. That's the first thing we should see. That's the what. We are adopted as sons. But the second thing is that we're adopted by grace.

This is the how. We're adopted by grace. Paul is not simply declaring to us that we've been adopted as sons simply to wow us with what we've received. The real purpose is to try to point us to the grace of God. That's exactly what he says. All right, this is to the praise of his glorious grace. And there are few things that more vividly show us the power of God's grace for helpless sinners than adoption.

It is a vivid way of seeing it. Now, this is the reason Paul follows up talking about election with adoption. You know, the reason we talk about election so much is because we are able to see God's grace there. It is a powerful thing for us to be able to say that God simply unilaterally shows us his grace. We have no part in our election. He simply elects us. But if there's a problem with election, if I can say there is a problem, and it's simply this. Election is a little abstract.

It's hard for us to understand and get our minds around. But adoption is election made visible. It is election made concrete. Now, you look at verse 5. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ. This is something that he does simply because of his own will. He does it not because of anything in ourselves. It is simply because of his grace. We don't do anything to make our adoption happen. We are not children in the orphanage crying out day and night, please adopt me, please adopt me. There's nothing in us that is worthy of praise. But God simply loves us. Before we love him, adopts us into his family, and we are able to enjoy perfect communion with him as part of the family of God. We are able to be brought in as sinners, cleaned up from our dirty rags. We are able to put on the family clothes. We are able to sit down at the table with our brother and with our heavenly father, and we are able to enjoy communion with him and with each other. That is something that is the same thing as election, but it's made concrete. It is real in a different sense, where you're able to put your mind around it in a different way. You are able to call upon God as a child, because God's grace alone is what saves us, redeems us, and adopts us in Jesus Christ. It is only in him that we are adopted as sons. As it says, we are predestined for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ.

[24 : 49] Every blessing that we receive, from the very smallest to the very greatest, that we receive from God is received in Jesus Christ. We are able to enjoy things because they are bound up in Jesus Christ. If we get Jesus Christ, we get these blessings. They simply overflow out of God, and we are able to see his love for us. That's the how. But the final thing I want you to see here is the why.

We are adopted by God for praise. That's what we're adopted for. We are adopted by God for praise. That's the why. We are adopted in order, not simply for us to sit around and think about adoption, for us to be loud by the thought of it, but for us to actually open up our mouths and sing forth with hearts that are full of love for our Heavenly Father. We are called to be able to sing better because of these verses. And if we don't sing because of them, if we don't open up our hearts, if we don't open up our lips in praise of God, we really have left something on the table with this passage. We are called to simply enjoy God for what he has done. And this is a great and tremendous blessing that allows us to see the grace of God. And so we are called to praise that grace. We are called to praise Jesus Christ, our brother, and we are called to praise our Heavenly Father. This is the why. It is theology moving to doxology, not simply thinking, but mind moving to heart, having it pour out of every facet of our beings. And that's once again part of the family resemblance. Just as when you see

Jesus Christ walking through this world, and you are able to see in the Gospels, he is overjoyed with the relationship that he has with his Heavenly Father. He's able to find comfort in that and joy in that. We are called to find that same joy in praise, and we are called to do it in such a way that others can see us, not because of us, but because of what God has done. To see the great wonders of God's grace that are in Jesus Christ and that are in adoption. This is a wonderful blessing that we have in Jesus.

But there's one pastoral issue I want to deal with very quickly. You know, some of us actually have very hard relationships with our earthly fathers. You know, some of us have experienced and we've grown up and we remember our father in actually poor ways. We remember the mistakes. We remember being mistreated. And that's actually a real pastoral concern and difficulty. I don't want to dismiss it.

But the way I want you to think about it is that that is a satanic attack designed to try to take away from you some joy in the Gospel. It is trying to destroy the relationship that you have with your earthly father in order to try to sully the relationship you have with your Heavenly Father.

[28 : 04] And so there are some people who think, well, my earthly father was so horrible. How can this joy of adoption actually make me sing? I simply think about my earthly father? You know, that's a real concern, but it is possible to move by that. Now, I want to tell you the story of Henry Francis Light. Henry Francis Light was a hymn writer and he was born to a particularly bad father. This is a father who abandoned his wife, went off, married another woman, and the stepmother said, you can either have me or you can have your son. It's one or the other. And his father packed him up to boarding school and they never saw each other for the rest of his life. The only communication he had with his earthly father was a series of letters done in a very business-like style. And at one point in one of those letters, it said, you know, it's about time. You're old enough. It's time for you not to call me father.

It's time for you to call me uncle. And from that point forward, every single letter from his father was simply written, signed off by Uncle Light. But Henry Francis Light wrote one of the hymns that we sung earlier today, Praise My Soul, the King of Heaven. And in that hymn, it has this third verse.

Father-like, he tends and spares us well, our feeble frame he knows. In his hand, he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes. How is it that Henry Francis Light, having such a horrible father, is able to write those words? Well, the answer is that you need to move your eyes from your earthly father up to your heavenly father. And you're called to see the love that Jesus has for his heavenly father and the love that the heavenly father has for Jesus Christ. You're called to open up the scriptures and see the prayer of John 17 and how Jesus is pouring his heart out to his heavenly father, talking of the joy and the love that he has for them, how God has glorified him and he seeks to glorify God. You're called to see that, see the intimacy of that love and realize that is what you are supposed to understand God's love for us in adoption is. You're called to see that love in Jesus Christ.

Look at Jesus's relationship with his father, because the love that the father has for the son is actually the same love that he has for us. You notice it says in verse six, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. He has adopted us for sonship in Jesus Christ, in his own son, in his own beloved, and he loves us in him. We receive the same love of God that Jesus receives as the son of God. And that is a wonderful thing for us to see. And we're called to look at our brother and emulate him and rise above our earthly fathers. And that's actually a good thing if your earthly father is bad or if your earthly father is good. Because even if you have the best earthly father, your earthly father is nothing compared to our heavenly. He is true. He is perfect. He cares for you in ways you cannot imagine. And you can spend every single moment for the rest of your life praising him for what he has done, praising him for his mercy and his gentleness, praising him for the salvation that he has given you. And it would still be a drop in the bucket to the praise that he is owed.

That is a wonderful thing for us to see. What we are called to do because of adoption is simply bow our heads in prayer. And there is a great promise for us in this text. If you bow your head today, perhaps for the hundredth time because your life is falling apart, perhaps for the first time in as long as you can remember, as soon as you say the words, my father, you are whisked into the throne room of God.

[32 : 10] The angels wait in line before you and you are sitting before your father enjoying the most intimate communion with him. You are able to skip in line where the angels fear to tread because of the adoption that we have in Jesus Christ. And if you are not in Jesus Christ, this could be yours. What you need is not 1999. What you need is simply faith in Jesus Christ. Repent of your sins, turn to him, and you will be able to lead today, calling upon Jesus Christ as your brother and God as your father.