

Jesus and I - He is my Brother

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[0 : 00] Let's turn our minds now to Galatians chapter 4, where we're going to look especially at verses 6 and 7, but we can read also from verse 4 because these verses are so closely connected together.

So Galatians 4, reading at verse 4 and looking at verses 6 and 7. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth a son born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who are under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and of a son, then an heir through God.

Well, we've been following the theme of Jesus and I throughout our communion services beginning last night from chapter 6, Jesus and I, he is my host.

This morning, chapter 2 and verse 20, we looked at being crucified with Christ, how Jesus and I is seen in that in terms of Jesus, my life.

[1 : 15] He is no longer I who live, but Jesus Christ lives in me. And tonight we come to chapter 4, where Jesus and I is put forward in terms of adoption, where we can say from this, he is my brother.

Or to put it another way, we can say that his father is also our father. Yes, Jesus is God's eternal son.

We don't have that relationship with him, but nevertheless, we are sons of God as surely as Jesus is his eternal son.

And not only that, but we are connected to Christ in such a way, as we saw this morning, not only by faith, as we saw this morning, but also in the fact that he has taken our very human nature to himself.

And that in all of that, as he himself indeed called his disciples, we are his brothers. And it is the purpose of God, as Romans chapter 8 puts it, the climax, the very summit of his salvation, is that we will be conformed to the image of God's son, so that he will be the firstborn among many brethren.

[2 : 37] So you see, all through that, it's right of us to think of Jesus as the brother of those who are saved. He is the elder brother.

Old theologians had no problem in thinking of Jesus as the elder brother, as one who is now the representative and advocate in heaven at the right hand of God.

But it's as sons of God that we have come, especially into this relationship with God as our father, where we have him as our father, the same father as Jesus has.

So, we're looking at this here in terms of the adoption that's mentioned in these verses. Now, you notice here that the purpose of the cross is brought before us in verse 5, that this is in fact why God sent forth the Son.

That's why Jesus came to die on the cross. The Bible has many ways of answering the question, why did Jesus die the death of the cross? And there are many ways to answer that.

[3 : 44] If you put it another way, what was the purpose of Christ's death on the cross? In that sense, why did Jesus die? There are so many ways of answering it that the Bible itself gives us.

He died to save us from our sins. He died so that we would be justified, that we would be right with God, having the righteousness of Christ, the righteousness which the law requires.

He died so that we would have our sins forgiven. And what it says here is, He died so that we would receive adoption.

He died in order that we would become the sons of God. Adoption, the catechism, is always interesting, not only for the definitions or the descriptions, the summaries, if you like, it gives of the great teachings of the Bible in regard to all things that are necessary for us really to know.

But it's also important to look at the order in which the catechism questions are placed. Because as you know, the catechism talks about Jesus, his incarnation, his three offices of prophet, priest, and king, and his death on the cross, how we are then made partakers of the redemption that he's purchased, that it's by the Spirit working faith in us and uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling. [5 : 15] And then it asks the question, what benefits do those who are effectually called receive in this life? And it mentions these three, justification, adoption, and sanctification.

And then it goes on to speak about each of these in turn. Now all of that's important in the order in which the catechism has put it. In other words, what it's saying is, when you are effectually called, when God calls you and joins you to Christ by working faith in your heart of faith that you exercise, that's required of us, that you use in order to bring Christ into your own possession, when you are effectually called, and that faith is operating, these three benefits exist side by side. You're justified, you're adopted, you're being sanctified. And tonight we're looking at the second of what the catechism calls benefits.

But what you're then going to see is that inside each of these, there are other benefits mentioned. As you look into adoption, tonight we'll see that there are two particular benefits inside adoption itself, which is a benefit of our effectual calling.

But let's look at God's adoption, first of all, of sons to be his own sons or children. What it says there, because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his sons into our hearts.

[6 : 47] Now, of course, when it says sons, females are not to feel left out of it. A lot of modern thinking in terms of this has changed the words of the translation of, in the translation, English translation of the Bible, where you've got things like persons.

And that's not necessarily wrong, but it's easy enough to understand that Paul is not leaving females out of this. He's really using something that was current in his own day in the Roman Empire, in Roman practice, where heirs in a family that didn't have children in a relationship, in a marriage that had no children, very often Romans, especially well-to-do Romans, would adopt adult males.

They would legally adopt them into being their legal children, and then the inheritance, the family name, and so on, would pass on through them.

And that's really what Paul has in mind, that sort of environment, that sort of culture of his day, when he's here talking about God's adoption. God, whether we're male or female, makes us his children, makes us heirs with an inheritance, makes us his own personal family, gives to us the privileges that we have when we have him as our father.

So when you are tonight male or female, it doesn't really make any difference as far as adoption is concerned. You have this privilege, this benefit. You are a child of God.

[8 : 25] You belong to his family by his own act of grace. But there's a difference. In fact, there's more than one difference between ordinary adoption, which you of course still find today, and this spiritual adoption.

For one thing, your adoption is never actually separated from other things that you learn in the Bible, such as regeneration. Regeneration is an essential.

We've looked at, or mentioned it at least in an essential. And regeneration is the way in which God brings us to life. You are dead, he says, to the Ephesians in trespasses and sins, but you were quickened.

You were brought to life. How are we brought to life? How are we as dead sinners brought to life? We are brought to life by the Holy Spirit. By the Holy Spirit's energy or work.

God changes our life. God brings us to life spiritually. We have a spiritual resurrection before we have a physical one. We come into the possession of life. We are marked by life, not as we used to be by death.

[9 : 35] We are a new creation by the work, by the power of the Spirit of God. And you can never separate that from adoption. Because when you are regenerated, when you are brought to life, when you are effectually called and joined to Christ, when all of that is mentioned, you have to hold it all together.

You cannot separate the adoption from the regeneration. What does that really mean effectually? Well, it means this difference to natural adoption. Just think for a moment of children brought into care.

Children whose parents can't look after them or are not looking after them adequately. They're brought into care. They might be fostered out. But they may end up being adopted. And given legal status as members of a particular family. And those children can actually count themselves to be the legal heir to whatever that family inheritance is. But the one thing they will not have is the likeness of their legal parents. They're not going to be like these legal parents in their appearance.

[10 : 49] They can't give that to them even though they give the whole inheritance to them. Now with God it's different. Because not only does He give the whole inheritance to them that Jesus has secured for them the inheritance of heaven.

That's all theirs. But He also gives them His likeness. He makes them like Himself. He restores the image of Christ so that in His likeness they are recreated, if you like, spiritually.

And that's why, as we mentioned, their final summit of redemption, their final state in redemption and salvation is that they will be in the image of God's Son.

He'll be the firstborn amongst these many brethren that make up God's family. the likeness of the parent is actually there.

And the Bible uses that in different ways in a practical sense. It's not just enough for us to know the theology of this that's important. That's something that we always try to emphasize.

[11 : 59] You're not going to be an equipped Christian to any great extent unless you know something of the doctrines of the Bible. Unless you're concerned to grow in an understanding of the great doctrines of the faith.

But for example, in the way Jesus spoke in the Beatitudes in Matthew 5, you remember He said, Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

Now why did He say that it's the peacemakers especially that are called the children of God?

Because the other Beatitudes also speak about actions or attributes that you could say also are done by the children of God.

But it's with the peacemakers especially that He said, They shall be called the children of God. And one of the reasons for that surely is that when we are making peace, when we are actually in the business of trying to bring about reconciliation between people that are estranged or have fallen out, when we are making peace in whatever sense we are at times required to do that, then we are like God.

Because that's what God the Father has done. He sent His Son to make peace. He sent His Son to reconcile us to Himself. He sent His Son so that peace would actually characterize our relationship as Christians with each other.

[13 : 21] That's why the psalm we sang is so important in that regard where the psalmist prays for the peace of Jerusalem, for relationships between the people of God to be marked by peace, not by strife or rivalries or dissension, which the Apostle Paul so often in his writings refers to.

So there is something that follows through into the practicalities of the Christian life. It is just a theological thing that God makes us like Himself spiritually by working in us in such a way that by the Holy Spirit we come to His likeness.

We have to show that. We have to demonstrate that. We are given opportunities to show the world that God is our Father. That the world itself will be, if necessary, forced to say one thing about Him or one thing about her.

He is acting as the Bible tells me God acted in making peace, in being concerned to protect unity and peace, to stand for truth, not to waver in the face of opposition.

So you see, he's saying that we are now the children, the sons of God by adoption. And what that means is that as God makes us His children as adopted sons, then we come to discover so many things that the Bible itself packs into the privilege of being a son of God.

[15 : 01] To have God as your Father. To have a perfect Father. To have a Father you know will look after you and look after your interests.

All of us as earthly fathers fail some more than others. But God as a Father is our perfect model. He cares for His children. He looks after His children.

He feeds His children spiritually. Who gave us the Lord's Supper? Well, Jesus instituted it. But really it's God that from the days of the Passover in Egypt all through the Old Testament had given that as an observance to His people so that they would know His fatherly blessings.

That they would know His care. That they would realize how much He was committed to looking after them. And it goes further than that too because Hebrews 12 one of the great passages that deals with God's way of correcting us when we need correcting tells us that correction is difficult to experience.

Difficult for us to put up with to accept. Because when we need correction sometimes God uses what the Bible calls His rod. Makes things painful for us.

[16:20] It's not very comfortable for a Christian to go astray from obedience to God. Maybe it will feel alright for a while.

Maybe God will leave it that way for a while. But eventually it becomes if we are really His it becomes very painful because God is not prepared to let His people go on in a life of straying from the path of obedience and commitment to Him.

Therefore you have what Hebrews 12 calls chastening or chastisement. And the remarkable thing is as that passage puts that chastening is a mark of fatherly love.

We have it says earthly fathers who chastened us who corrected us in the way in which they themselves thought fit. But God does it for our good.

And it's not a mark of us not being the children of God it's the opposite. Because it says every son whom the father loves he corrects.

[17:34] Chastening if you know it in your experience and all of us know it in different ways at different times. Even the workings of your conscience can be a chastening. It doesn't have to be an event in your life it doesn't have to be something in which you experience outward pain or loss or an experience that really does fill you with trauma.

It may be that. But many of these things need not be chastenings. Many good people who don't need such correction who are not out of the way of obedience still have very difficult providences to contend with.

You can have chastening in all different ways but the point is it's always a mark of God love a mark of fatherly care and we shouldn't rebel against it but rather yield to it.

No chastening it says in Hebrews 12 for the present seems to be joyous but grievous nevertheless afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness but don't leave it there to those who are exercised thereby to those who accept it to those who receive it willingly and believing and submissively so there's one of the great marks of being under the fatherly care of God he looks after us he will not let us go he will not let us stray so as to be lost again he will correct us when need be it's all part of being his sons his children his family and it means too that I spent a bit more time on that point than I intended but I think it was something that the Lord himself wanted to bring before us as to his own remarkable care for his children but what you can say is if you think about it again in relation to justification you'll see the point to this in a moment justification you can say that's where we're accounted righteous by

God where the righteousness of Jesus is put onto our record and God looks upon us as righteous with that righteousness we are acceptable to God we are right with him you could say that's really the foundational benefit of effectual calling and in a sense adoption is built onto that although it accompanies it and if justification is the foundational benefit adoption is the crowning benefit there's no higher benefit than to be a child of God to be restored in a way that you belong to God's family there is no higher benefit than that because that's what it says here if you are since you are sons of God God has sent his spirit into your hearts it's because you are his sons because you have this great privilege that this then follows so tonight if you're a child of

[20:50] God that's your greatest privilege to have been taken by adoption into the family of God let me ask you this question not me that's asking it it's really something that arises from the scriptures are you adopted do you belong to God's family are you a child of God do you know God as your father and you might say in response to that I can't adopt myself it's God who adopts yes but remember that justification is the foundational benefit and how do you come to be justified by faith in Christ so when the question is asked am I adopted you still have to go back to this question do I believe have

I trusted in Christ is he my savior is he my elder brother have I made him my elder brother have I received him as he's offered in the gospel as my elder brother so that I can by receiving him also say I'm now an adopted child of God I have God as my father God's adoption of sons well what about secondly the benefits of adoption there are two mentioned in the passage that we need to deal with briefly first of all the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and secondly that we are an heir through

God so there's the fact of being an heir secondly and firstly the fact that God's children have the Holy Spirit and notice what he's saying because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father the spirit of

God vacated our human souls at the fall now there's no verse in the Bible so far as I know that actually says that categorically or clearly but you infer it you work back from the New Testament in certain things and this is one of them the New Testament tells us of the spirit coming into our souls of the spirit's restoring of something which we lost in the fall in Adam and you infer from that as well as other things the Bible teaches about sin and about the way in which the spirit as he dwells comes to deal with that sin you infer from that that when man fell in Adam the Holy Spirit vacated our soul as his dwelling place it became what some theologians used to describe as the temple falling into ruin there was nobody living in it anymore its previous occupant was gone and as the previous occupant left so life left with him now in his place it's just deadness it's ruined it's overgrown it's derelict it needs to be restored how is it restored it's restored by grace it's restored by Christ coming to occupy as we saw this morning through the

Holy Spirit because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into your hearts the Holy Spirit comes back to inhabit to live and to occupy our souls remarkable truth in itself but as part of what belongs to our redemption and to our adoption particularly because it is here associated with being sons you notice what he's saying it's because you are sons it doesn't say the spirit of God has been sent into your hearts so that you would become sons it's the other way around because you are sons because God has made you his children so he has sent in consequence the spirit of his son into your hearts no other qualification is required we come across all sorts of ideas that unless you do certain things certain steps that you carry out that you need to do certain prayers certain levels of achievement spiritually you're not going to have the holy spirit fully in your heart let's put it that way that's absolute nonsense because what this is telling us is if you're a child of God then God has sent forth his holy spirit into your heart not half the spirit not something of the spirit but the holy spirit celebrate that fact rejoice in it that you are a home for

God God by his grace of adoption but not only has he brought you into his family but in doing so he's been pleased to come to make your soul his home to come to occupy it and the word sent forth there is exactly the same word as in verse 4 for God sending forth his son when Jesus came into the world to be born God sent him forth into the world and he took our nature and that's how he came into the world he sent him forth and the same words used here of the spirit in other words you have this remarkable coincidence in the sense of two things that are very much the same the definiteness with which Jesus became one of us the definiteness with which he actually came to be born into the world it's such a conclusive definite thing that God sent forth his son we have no doubts about that but the same word is used of God sending forth his spirit are we as sure about our possession of the spirit as we are about

[27 : 16] God sending forth his son we should be because as his children having the spirit of God is just as sure and just as certain as the fact that God sent forth his son he sent forth his son he sent forth his spirit because you are sons and he came and sent forth his son into our heart the spirit of his son into our hearts crying Abba father the word Abba is Hebrew or rather Aramaic and it really means essentially the same thing as father but it has an intimacy to it you could say that it means something like dear father it's father as loved it's father as appreciated it's dear father and that's what the spirit of God has brought to us that we ourselves cry

Abba father it's not the spirit that's crying Abba father but by the spirit or through the spirit we come to cry Abba father and cry is a very strong word it means an earnest outcry in other words you ask the question well what does this mean how do I come to be sure that God is my father how do I come to be persuaded that I am a child of God indeed you can link it up with Romans 8 certainly but let's just confine it to this well it's not by the spirit of God coming into your heart and all of a sudden you keep hearing voices every day you're a child of God you're a son of God you're an adopted child of God it doesn't happen like that it happens in our relationship with God as his children primarily through prayer and our experience of the word let me put it this way when you come before God when you come privately for yourself to pray to him do you come reluctantly do you come afraid that he will not receive you do you come in the spirit of a slave or in the spirit of a son if you're a child of God you know what I mean you don't come in the spirit of a slave you don't come in the spirit of a child that's come to hurt themselves seriously and comes to the room in which they know their father is actually sitting and is prepared to knock the door because they know their

father's busy doing something let's say it's a study and although they're seriously injured they've broken their arm or something like that they don't come to the door and say well I'd better not disturb my father he'll be annoyed just now he doesn't want to see me just now he'll just barge in and say father dad help me you don't think about even whether it's your father or not you just do it and very often that's the greatest evidence you have that you're a child of God when you don't have to stop to think about whether or not he is your father you just get on with being his child you go before him you speak to him as your father you're convinced he will receive you he's not going to refuse you he's not going to say come away go away and come back when I've got more time for you I'm too busy just now to listen to you you've never heard God saying that as your father ah here is one of our great privileges the great privilege of being children of God of having him as our father that you're able to come with what the bible itself calls boldness not irreverence but boldness reverently worshipfully but also boldly with the spirit of the child that knows you're coming to your father and that knows your father for who he is and not only are you a child with God as your father through the indwelling of the spirit crying

Abba father but you're also an heir through God if a son then an heir and through God reminds us of course that this is all of grace it is through what God himself has done in Christ and by his spirit we haven't achieved this we haven't done something that warrants our being called children of God and accept it we haven't earned it we haven't reached the pinnacle of achievement where God is obliged now to receive us as his children it's through God through sheer grace through undisserved favor through the death of Christ through all that is in him in the father's presence and he says you are an heir through God now if you compare that with Romans chapter 8 Romans 8 adds a couple of details I'm going to finish with this not only are we an heir through

God but Romans 8 says you are joint heirs with Christ heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ and one of the reliable commentators on Romans Professor John Murray says that you can take heirs of God certainly to mean heirs as God has made you an heir heirs of God in the sense of God himself has done but he says it's very difficult if not impossible to go the other step further than that and say that God himself is our inheritance you are heirs of God himself heirs himself your inheritance what a remarkable thing that is but it's true to the Bible Psalm 16 God is my portion you find it in Psalm 73 as well God is my portion my inheritance

[33 : 48] Lamentations chapter 3 verse 24 in the midst of such darkness as Jeremiah had in the fall of Jerusalem out he comes with these brilliant statements of faith the Lord is my portion saves my soul therefore I will trust in him what does he mean the Lord is my portion well just ask the question what is it that God's people are going to enjoy beginning in this world but especially uninterrupted in eternity what is it that they are going to enjoy well actually I have to rephrase the question it's not so much a matter of what they will enjoy as who they will enjoy and the opening question of our catechism reminds us of that powerfully what is man's chief end what is the end for which we were created what is the main the principal reason for our being it is to glorify

God and to enjoy him forever there are no more precious words in the English language than that enjoy him forever and that's what adoption restores what sin in Adam broke us off from grace in Christ restores us too because you are sons you are also heirs of God but Romans passage also has this joint heirs with Christ and see you are back to what we had this morning because none of this is ours detached from Christ all of this to put another way is ours as sons of God in union with Christ joined to Christ you have no blessing separated from him you have no life separated from him you have no hope separated from him the moment you are attached to him by faith all things are yours all things that he's died for all things that God has promised to his people they all become yours union with Christ you see that's I think why he's saying here that the

Holy Spirit is what's why he calls him the spirit of his son that's a deep phrase that's a phrase that's filled with very very deep things spiritually but the spirit that comes into our hearts the Holy Spirit is the spirit of sonship Romans 8 calls it that the spirit of our adoption the spirit God gives to us as his children but it's also the spirit of his son to whom we are joined and that joining that union that connection that we have with Christ is surely brought out in the fact that he is the spirit of his son and the spirit of his sons and the joint is there the same spirit is the spirit of Christ and the spirit of God's people he is their brother they are his brothers they are joined together by grace they are the one family and they are sons of God are heirs through

Christ as joined to him do you have an elder brother in heaven do you have Jesus as your elder brother do you know him and the privilege of being joined to him is there anything more important to

you than to leave this place tonight in union with Christ it brings you everything you have nothing without it I trust that all of us from this communion from all our meetings especially from the blessing of God and his word will come to know this highest privilege of being children of God and as sons of God being given the spirit of God to live in our hearts never to leave it again and to have the hope in our hearts of looking forward to heaven to finally meet with father and to be with him at home forever let's pray

Lord our God we confess that we cannot adequately understand or describe the great privileges that we own in Christ we acknowledge Lord that as we depend upon your words so we pray that you would forgive anything we say or think that is amiss anything that is contrary indeed to what the truth itself is in Christ Jesus but give us we pray daily to come to delve more and more into the wonder of these things of our redemption and give us we pray an increased appetite in our souls to grow in the knowledge and in the grace of Christ receive our thanks now we pray and forgive our sin for his name sake Amen