

# Adoption (1)

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Preacher: Ivor Macdonald

[ 0 : 00 ] I would like to follow with you over the next day or two a thread in scripture which is the doctrine of adoption, the fatherhood of God, our privilege of being called to be sons of the living God in Jesus Christ.

And what I would like to do this evening as we open up this theme is to look at how our salvation in Christ is seen as our adoption as God's children.

And we will base our thoughts largely on this portion from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. The great doctrine of adoption and particularly now our salvation as being brought from one family into another.

It's ironic isn't it that many of the blessings, the privileges that society today stands most in need of, society is most averse to.

At least secular, non-Christian society. I'm thinking of family. I'm thinking of fatherhood. Because in secular society, especially in the cities today, we have so many different arrangements in homes.

[ 1 : 32 ] Because we're continually being told that there's no such thing as the traditional family unit of a father and a mother and several children. Then secular society wants to shy off speaking of family altogether.

And if that is true of families, it's even more so of fatherhood. Because there are plenty of examples of men who have abused their children, have been unfaithful to their wives, been violent.

And because most single parents today are women, because the father has simply chosen to walk off and enjoy his freedom. And fathers, as a group, are seen as damaged goods, a failed experiment.

Or something which registers bad feelings in the lives of children and young people. And yet one of the most powerful metaphors that the Bible uses for Christian experience is this picture of the family.

And of being children of the living God. And in particular, for reasons that we'll see, the Bible speaks of as being sons of God.

[ 2 : 46 ] Because of the privileges that the son had in biblical days. And so we've got to look together this evening at what it is to be saved through the focus of adoption.

What it is to be brought into the family of God. And it is possible that we may come to this theme and we ourselves may have had bad experience of some kind or another.

Our relationship with an earthly father may not have been a good relationship. And many liberal scholars simply dismiss the biblical teaching on fatherhood on those grounds.

It's no longer relevant to people in the modern day who have lived life scarred by their experience of an earthly father. James Packer, in his classic book, *Knowing God*, has a very strong section on being sons of God.

And he makes two very potent responses to that objection. First, he says that it's not true that you can never understand something if you've had a bad experience.

[ 4 : 06 ] He's not bad. If you've had a bad experience of your earthly father, of course it's still possible to understand in a negative way what a good father is.

It's possible to say that my experience of my father was this, that, and the next thing. It was bad in this way and the next. But I know that my heavenly father is all that my earthly father was not.

He is the father that I longed for. And also, it's not true to say that we have to go solely on our understanding of an earthly father and project to a heavenly father.

In fact, the reverse is the case. And the Bible is full of teaching on what God's fatherhood is like. He is, after all, the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And our understanding of earthly fatherhood is based on the revelation of God's fatherhood to the Son. Well, why is it important for us to see our Christian experience through this lens of adoption? [ 5 : 27 ] Why is it important for us as Christians to really appreciate the Bible's teaching on what it is to be brought into the family of God? Well, because it is the chief blessing that we have as believers.

As Professor John Murray said that adoption is the apex of redemptive privilege. It's there right at the top. It's the pinnacle. Whilst justification is certainly the basic and the prime blessing because it lays the foundation for us knowing God.

Adoption is the pinnacle. It is the mountaintop. Think of it in these terms. In justification, we're in the law court.

But with adoption, we're in the living room. It's a wonderful thing to hear of our salvation as God's people in terms of the verdict of not guilty being passed by the judge.

And to hear that this judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, comes down to pay the penalty of our crimes, the way it's often explained. But it's altogether more wonderful to know that the judge, Jesus himself, comes down and brings us into his home and makes us members of his family.

[ 6 : 56 ] That is such a more precious and a warmer and a higher privilege still. So, adoption brings us more than anything else into this family-oriented, this relational truth of the gospel.

Let me quote again from J.I. Packer. This is what he says in an often quoted passage about the adoption of children.

Adoption of the children of God. He says this, Everything that is distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God.

Father is the Christian name for God. Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.

So, there's a prime reason for us to grasp this great doctrine. And there are also many pressing pastoral reasons why it is important for us to understand that God is our father.

[ 8 : 43 ] That we have been brought into this new familial relationship with God. Because unless we really do grasp it, then we will be easy prey for the evil one as he comes and as he sows thoughts, destructive thoughts in our mind.

Unless we understand adoption, how are we to respond when the devil comes and says to us, Are you really God's son? Given where you came from?

And what you've done? Are these people in the church really your brothers and sisters? Given their different backgrounds?

Will you really your brothers and sisters? Will you really be welcomed into God's family with the baggage that you bring with you?

Will I always be God's child? If I do something bad, will he still be my father? Will you be my father?

[ 10 : 11 ] Will he still be my father? William ■ zuz anybody Will he lose his status of son because of his disobedience?

but the grace of God promised in the garden is revealed in Jesus and the purpose is to restore lost children to the family and at the grand finale of this biblical story when we've moved all the way from Genesis through to Revelation at the end there is this great cry he who overcomes will inherit I will be his God and he will be my son and so the whole story of the Bible is one of sonship lost and sonship restored and what God is doing on this great cosmic scale he's doing individually in your life and in mine and we have the pictures of this adoption throughout the Old Testament we don't really get the word adoption until we come into

Paul's letters because adoption as a concept wasn't really used in the Old Testament they had other ways of catering for our childless families and so on but we have these wonderful pictures of how God saw first of all for example his own people as his firstborn son we have the people of Israel going into Egypt and Pharaoh lording it over them as a malevolent father breaking their backs under the burden of servitude in Egypt and then the true father of Israel coming and declaring through Moses Israel is my firstborn let my firstborn free that he might serve me wonderful picture and then we have that even warmer picture still in the book of Ruth Ruth is someone who really gets adopted she appears on the scene as a widow helpless spiritually and physically and emotionally physically she is a woman in a dangerous world she is without land and she is without a husband to support her and spiritually she is an outsider because she is a Moabites who once worshipped the god Chemosh and was a member of a people the Moabites who were specifically

excluded by God because historically they had opposed Israel on their way out of Egypt they refused to provide food and instead they had hired Balaam the prophet to curse Israel and Ruth is under this sad ban and emotionally Ruth is alone she is in a strange land she is vulnerable and yet with all of these things which would make life so isolated and so difficult for Ruth she commits herself to Naomi's God and she finds in Naomi's God one who extends his wing and gives her shelter under his wing and God appoints Boaz as her kinsman redeemer and he marries her and as a result she is adopted into the people of Israel and marvelously finds her name in the physical lineage of the Lord

Jesus Christ an outsider a woman brought from one family into another but it's in these epistles of Paul written to Christians who were living in communities which were under Roman law in which the Roman custom of adoption was widely known and understood that Paul uses adoption as a great picture of explaining what it is to be brought from darkness into light brought from the control of Satan into the freedom of God the Father and he explains to us in the second chapter in the verses we read he explains to us why it is we need to have this adoption verses 4 and 5 of the first chapter he introduces the wording of adoption and then in the second chapter in chapter 2 verse 2 he tells us why it was necessary because he says for in time past he walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lust of our flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath we were says

[ 15 : 59 ] Paul we were children of disobedience and we were children of wrath we were children of disobedience we were members of a family that was characterized by disobeying God this was our nature we had the family resemblance disobedience was the family trait Jesus could say to the Pharisees you are of your father the devil he was a liar from the beginning you show the family resemblance Paul is saying here you were sons of disobedience you were children of disobedience in other words we weren't just passively rejecting the gospel we were actively opposed to the gospel sometimes I don't think we really appreciate that we think sometimes of ourselves and of others in a non-Christian state that they're simply indifferent but the New Testament always reminds us that there is an antagonism towards the things of

God I was listening to a Gideon speaker a couple of weeks ago and he was telling the gathering about some people who had been brought to faith through the distribution of Gideon Bibles and one man that he mentioned had been brought up in quite a respectable family but had ended up with a drink habit and eventually he was in prison and a Christian asked the Gideons to come and place a Bible in this man's cell and the man was so annoyed at this he picked up the Bible and threw it against the cell wall saying whoever you are God you're not real quite an absurd and illogical way to react but there was a struggle going on a struggle of course to which he had to succumb to God and came to know God but there was a raging you were like the rest children of disobedience you were part of a family characterised by disobeying God and because of that because of that family background you were also children of wrath you were under the wrath of

God what a terrible family to belong to and so long as we refuse to come to Jesus this is our situation this is our family and it's a dysfunctional family because everyone within this family is characterised by the desire to put themselves first it's one way of looking at sin it's a being turned in on oneself and so there's a lack of peace and there's a lack of love and there's a lack of self control and the head of the family of course is the devil who is the ultimately bad family bad father i think it was maybe three weeks or so ago there was a horrific piece of news from the united states about a father who with the agreement of his wife kept their son locked up in his room a young man called Mitch

Comer in Georgia and he had been so malnourished and so deprived of sunlight and fresh air that at 18 years old he still had his baby teeth it's a shocking story one asks how could a father be so heartless how could a father be so unnaturally cruel to his son let me think back to Egypt pharaoh the father relentlessly cruel to the children that god claimed as his own indifferent to their suffering breaking their backs making bricks without stroke not care you were by nature children of disobedience you were as a consequence paul says children of wrath this was your family background and the question then is how can there be any possibility of breaking free from this kind of bondage and paul is telling us in the first verses of chapter one that the only possibility of freedom lies in the initiative of a divine father god god must call us to freedom god must call us out

of one family into another this is salvation story and so down in egypt god sends moyses to announce to pharaoh that israel is his son pharaoh no longer has any business with him pharaoh must let israel free because israel belongs to another father then the lord said to moyses say to pharaoh this is what the lord says israel is my son even my very first born and i say unto thee let my son go that he may serve me so israel would find freedom only because god the father acted and called his son to himself and that sin constituted then his family and we can only find freedom because god decided before we were even born to call us to himself was determined that he would adopt us as his children that of course is the wonderful thing when you think of the genius of the picture of adoption adoption takes place because of the choice the decision of the adoptive parent that is what god the father does just as the adoptive parent decides i will have this child in my family god the father does this also for us he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world verse 4 of chapter 1 that we should be holy and without blame before him having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by jesus christ he predestined us unto the adoption as children isn't that absolutely amazing no matter how familiar we are with that doctrine with that theme it should continually

stir up our wonder that god should choose me god should choose you when we had done nothing to commend ourselves to him before we were even there god had made his choice so adoption by god leaves no grounds for boasting it's god's fatherly choice his determination it's all of grace and god will take no will not take no for an answer there was no way that pharaoh would be allowed to hold back god's firstborn son god says to him you refuse to let my son go so i will kill your first born and on the night of the passover when the firstborn sons in egypt were slain pharaoh begs moyses to go along with the israelites god had broken down the prison door and taken his son to himself in love he predestinated us it was according to the good pleasure of his will that's such a significant aspect as well of the calling of the determination of the choice of god that he did it in love and that it was in accordance with the good pleasure of his will

[ 25 : 10 ] God's adoption of us God's taking us into his family is an act which is crafted in love crafted in love when I was ministering to the sky I got to know and appreciate the minister in the free church in Dunvegan Daniel Sladek, an American fellow and one of the things which I so admired about himself and his wife was the fact that for a number of years they had been fostering children and what was significant was that they as a couple have a family of their own and invest time with their children and derive great enjoyment from their own family and yet they still choose to bring toddlers infants young children into the family home some of them with behavioural problems that make their upbringing challenging the question is why because they already have a family there is no lack there is no want but the motive is simply one of love a desire to love and we think higher and we think so so so much higher of the love of God that within the fellowship of the trinity of the communion of love of father and son and of the holy spirit there is no want there is no lack there was no requirements in a sense for God to bring us into his family but simply from the overflow of his love

God has reached out reached out to the children he created to bring them out of bondage and into his family crafted in love according to the good pleasure of his will he did this think back again to the the story of Ruth and how Ruth found her place within the family of Israel you remember the cliffhanger scene at the close when we're expecting that Boaz will become her kinsman redeemer and it's revealed that there is actually someone who is nearer related than Boaz is and this man who is never named in the story is given the option to marry Ruth and to confer on her the security and the the warmth and the place in Israel and when he discovers that his own family interests might be undermined he backs off immediately but not so with Boaz there's an alacrity there's a a willingness an eagerness to do what he has promised to do to bring Ruth into the warmth of his home God is the same with us he chooses us in love he adopts us with gladness it pleased the living God the father to bring us into the embrace of his family he did not do it with clenched teeth and with heavy reluctance but it generated pleasure in the heart of God it brought him joy to do this it was his pleasure as well as his will adoption crafted in love and the result is that from being sons of disobedience and wrath we have been made sons of God sons of the living God the people who read Paul's letter this letter and the letter to the Galatians and the letter to the Romans they understood what Paul was unpacking when he spoke of God having adopted us they understood the ritual that went about when a wealthy man with an estate but no heir chose a young man to be his adopted son they knew how there was a transfer from one family

to another and the old ties were annulled and this young man became as much a son and an heir as though he had been a naturally born son they knew that often there was a sum of money agreed they knew that after the ceremony the young man acquired the name of the new family and entered into the responsibilities as well as the privileges of this new family and so it is with the adoption that we have as the children of

God the old headship is done away with as Satan no longer has anything to do with us no longer can we be maligned as being sons of disobedience sons of wrath that is not our paternity any longer we have become children of the living God and we come under the headship a loving headship of our heavenly father and just as an adoptive son came into privileges so he came into responsibilities if you were a son in Israel you were expected to work in the fields for your father you were expected to look after your parents as they became more frail and to provide for them and so it is here we come into the family of God and we have these immense privileges and these responsibilities Israel is my firstborn son the Lord says to Moses let my son go that he may serve me we are freed to serve brought into the love of God our father's arms that we might worship him all our days we must never understand our freedom from bondage and sin as freedom to do as we like we're freed to serve what a blessed thought this decisive breach bondage with one family with all the bad relationships with the burden with the bondage with all of the bad outlook that goes with that particular family and now to be brought into the family of

God to be known as a child of God God John in his first epistle when he is contemplating that we can grasp something of his own sense of wonder he's almost caught in mid-flight as he thinks of the huge privilege it is how great is the love the father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God behold what manner of love the father has bestowed on us that we should be children of God that is what we are we're nearly finished listen as we come to a close listen to Thomas Watson the Puritan praising God for adoption he writes extol and magnify God's mercy who has adopted you into his family who of slaves has made you sons of heirs of hell heirs of the promise as a thread of silver runs through a whole piece of work so free grace runs through the whole privilege of adoption adoption is greater mercy than

[ 33 : 41 ] Adam had in paradise he was a son by creation but here is a further sonship by adoption in a short story entitled the capital of the world Ernest Hemingway tells of a Spanish father who had fallen out with his son and the son had left home but after some time the father wanted to be reconciled with his son so he placed an advertisement in the local newspaper and the ad simply ran Paco meet me at the hotel Montana at noon on Tuesday all is forgiven love papa and in Hemingway's story we're told that Paco is a very common name in Spain and when the father went to the hotel the next day there there were 800 young men named

Paco waiting for their forgiving father telling isn't it this is the medicine the knowledge of God is our father this is the medicine that every hurting soul needs if only it understood it men and women boys and girls alienated from God needing to be brought back into the family maybe maybe there's someone here maybe you tonight are in that situation maybe as we've spoken about the glory of being within the family of God within your heart need will will you acknowledge that you are indeed a child of disobedience a child of wrath will you receive the forgiveness that is offered in Christ will you accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior from sin and as the Lord over your life because if you will then you will be brought into the family you will know that God is indeed your father also heavenly father we pray that you would bless your word to us thank you for the gospel which makes sons of hell become sons of heaven Lord we pray that you would bless the word preached tonight Lord we ask that if you are speaking to some who are not within this family as yet that your holy spirit might open hearts and minds and grant some to receive Jesus as he is offered freely tonight in his precious gospel for we pray in his name  
Amen