

Adopting Grace

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[0 : 00] Father in heaven, we thank you and we praise you for your adoption of us. We ask that as we listen to your word, that we would know the joy of your salvation, the joy of being your children.

We ask that your Holy Spirit would give us grace that we might follow in your ways, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Please be seated.

Please turn to Galatians 3, 23 through 29. And as you're turning there, you probably notice that David Short is very proud of this Australian medal from this week.

And I think probably all of you know that this was a Canadian defector named Dale Begg Smith, who won gold in the Moguls for his adopted country, Australia.

A few years ago, he became an Australian citizen. He's originally from Whistler, spent most of his life there. Now, you probably have a hard time with this. And newspapers did as well.

[1 : 08] The headlines on Thursday said, Canadian wins gold for Australia. And it gives a sense of what kind of resentment we're feeling.

Although I think we're sort of feeling that we're kind enough to lend Australia as a developing nation, something that gives their country a bit of luster. So we didn't want them to feel completely left out of the Olympics.

And I think this story has a little bit to do with this passage, just a little bit. Because it is about an adoption that is resented.

It's not actually accepted. An adoption that you're thinking, well, it's not really real. It's a bit too radical to really call it an adoption. And the title of this sermon is called Adopted by Grace.

And it's an excellent title chosen by David Short, an adopted Canadian. So we're really focusing on the fact that it is about a change in status.

[2 : 09] It's a new identity that is being talked about here in this passage from Galatians. It's good because adoption is what this passage is.

It's becoming sons and daughters of God by his grace. Now, false teachers in Galatia that were a bit like the newspapers like us today, they found it hard to accept that Gentiles could become sons and daughters of God simply because God in his grace adopted them.

After all, they did not have a family tree. They did not have a record of keeping the law of Moses. There was nothing that they had earned to get this new status.

It was simply granted to them because they trusted God for his gift. And I think it was also hard for the Gentiles to accept as well. It was a difficult adoption because none of them had the upbringing and religious habits of the Hebrews.

They may have had a hard time believing, has this really happened to us? Are we actually sons and daughters of God? It's a radical adoption.

[3 : 19] And I think it's also hard for each of us today because human nature, deep inside of us, tells us that we can establish ourselves before God. We have the sense that God owes us this status of being sons and daughters.

And we think this, I think, even more the longer that we are Christians. This is something that is our right. It is something that we should have because we're good people.

There's a lot about me for God to like. And I don't really need this radical new identity. But the gospel crushes those kinds of thinking.

It actually turns it upside down. It says, no, your identity always must be those who have been adopted by grace. That God has given you this new status as children of God.

And I want you to look at verses 23 and 25 because here are people who, probably more than any other people, understood that they had what it took to establish themselves before God.

[4 : 25] They had the law. And verses 23 through 25 say we because Paul is talking about himself along with the Jewish people. So in starting in verse 23, it says, Now before faith came, before Jesus came, we were confined.

We were imprisoned under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed, so that the law was our custodian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

You see what Paul is doing here? He is saying that the Hebrew people had the law and it was like, first of all, a prison. It was like being protected by military guards. And there is that sense of being confined, but also being protected.

But also, the law was a custodian. And when I was growing up, custodian meant janitor. But of course, custodian here means a guardian. Literally, the word means child leader.

And this was somebody who, for those who owned slaves, they would choose a servant, an older servant, to look after their young son. And so from the age of six or seven to the late teens, the boys who were under the custodianship actually had this guy walking around with them everywhere they went.

[5 : 49] He would walk them to school and from school. He'd watch their conduct at school. He'd direct them into how to be living a respectful and honorable kind of life.

And he made sure they did their homework. Actually, it sounds something like some of you might be very interested in. But when they became an adult at 18, they were free from this custodian.

So it was a temporary arrangement, this guy who had been protector and guide. And so Paul has this double sense of the law imprisoning and protecting. And Paul knew better than most what it meant to be a devout Pharisee, to be somebody who really knew what it was meant to keep the law.

But what he saw as he kept the law was that animals had to be sacrificed over and over again for his sins and for the sins of the people of God. And in the law, he saw constant reference to the fact that we are naturally unclean.

We become unclean by being in this world. And the law talks about what must be done to be cleansed. So he and all the Hebrew people were always being aware of God's holiness and their own uncleanness and condemnation.

[7 : 06] And the law protected them in the sense that it kept God's condemnation away through sacrifice of animals. But it also reminded them, and Paul knew this, that they couldn't perfectly keep the law.

They knew that they were imprisoned by sin. It wasn't possible to keep every letter of the law. And so anyone trying to do that would realize that in the end, they needed the mercy of God.

In a sense, they're driven to the grace of God. They knew that God would need to give them a righteousness that was not their own. That he in the end would have to save them, that they couldn't save themselves. The way that John Calvin put it is that the law was nothing else than an immense variety of exercises in which worshipers were led by the hand to Jesus Christ.

It's a wonderful way of putting it. The law is driving them to one who would have mercy, who would forgive their sins. And so the Jewish people were hungry for Jesus Christ when he came as our Savior and Redeemer.

And when they put their faith in Jesus, they were no longer under custodian. It was a completely new, free identity that they had. They had God's grace to rely on.

[8 : 26] And that's why Mary prophesied about Jesus, he has filled the hungry with good things. And that's what the Hebrew people were. They had become hungry for God's mercy and grace.

And the good things that they were filled with is in verses 26 and following. I want you to look at this. This is the great adoption. And here we see the good news, the gospel, given out to us, very simply, but it's very, very powerful.

Look at verse 26. This is the key verse here. It says, For in Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith.

And I want you to notice that he is going from saying we to you all. He's now speaking to Jew and Gentile together, not just Jews in Galatia. And he's saying both of you have been given a new status through faith in Jesus.

You have both been adopted by God. And that is shocking news, especially for the Jews, because this was always the great desire of everyone who was of the people of God to be called sons of God, to know God as their father.

[9 : 40] And here they find out that God does it through faith in Jesus Christ. He adopts them by the mercy of Jesus. And not only that, but Gentiles, and here's the even more shocking bit, Gentiles who are far away from God, who have no history with God, who don't deserve anything from God, suddenly have the same status, because of their same faith in Jesus Christ.

The same exalted status of being God's own children. You can't get over how shocked, you can't really overemphasize how shocking this is to hear this message.

It's as though, I hope some of you guys were here for the last sermon, but last week, it is as though you not only find out that you have an Uncle Bob who has given you \$365 million, I think it's gone up because of the Powerball thing down in the South, but he's not only given you \$365 million, he has given your worst enemy \$365 million as well as an inheritance.

The one you most dislike receives the same inheritance. A new relationship with Uncle Bob and a new relationship with your enemy is suddenly in your life.

What a shock. And this morning, God's Word is reminding us that we are included in that verse, that you are all adopted by God if you have faith in Jesus Christ.

[11 : 13] You are His daughters and sons. And that is your great identity. That is the status that is beyond anything this world can offer because you have inherited all the goodness of God through Jesus Christ.

And it's simply because of God's grace. This is adoption that can be hard for us to accept. One of the great ministries of our church is that a number of you here have adopted children.

And the invaluable part of that ministry is that each child is welcomed into a new family for life where they will be brought up not only to have a good family, but to love and know Jesus Christ.

It is a great act of love and grace for these couples to commit themselves to a child in this way.

Because this child doesn't earn that grace. Doesn't do anything in order to be suddenly given this grace.

But instead, they are blessed by their adoption for the rest of their life and into eternity because of the love of parents who have not met this child yet.

[12 : 25] And it's a picture of our own adoption as well. God adopts us as his own. We are welcomed into his family forever solely because of the grace and love of Jesus.

And so spiritually, you and I are like the babies in this congregation who are adopted. We didn't earn the adoption, but it will bless us into eternity. We who are far away with no connection with God like those babies, our lives are suddenly completely altered because of grace, because of the adoption by our Heavenly Father through Jesus.

We have a new family and a new identity. And I want to say that and to close this sermon with the fact that there are three implications of that verse, of this powerful verse that we have been made sons and daughters of God through Jesus Christ.

And the first has to do with character. Verse 27 really tells us those who trust in Jesus bear his name and his character. And so it says, many of you, as many of you are baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.

In other words, you are so united to Jesus that God sees his righteousness in you when he sees us. In his presence, he is seeing the goodness of Jesus Christ.

[13 : 52] It's a new identity. And I think that the baptisms that we had last week were a very good picture of that new identity. After each child is baptized, if you remember from last week, David put the sign of the cross on each person's forehead and said, I mark you with the sign of the cross as Christ's own forever.

It's a snapshot of who we are. And when we put our faith in Jesus, this is literally true for us. We have put on Christ. Now, I wasn't at the 11 o'clock service last week, but I understand that Lucy, who's here tonight, wasn't that thrilled about getting the sign of the cross on her forehead.

She was very good at ducking out of David's reach. And I think David rightly said, she knows what's coming. And you see, this new identity has implications for us.

It means that we will bear the character of Christ, that it will turn our life upside down, our values, the things that we live for. It's turned right upside down. So that if we are Christ's own, we will want to live for him.

Now, Galatians speak so much about grace that it's very easy for us to think, oh, well, law must just be out the window. We don't have to worry about law anymore. It's very tempting to think that it's abolished and we're free to do whatever we want now.

[15:18] Well, it's true that no longer does the law condemn us because Jesus has fulfilled the requirements for us and that he has been a perfect sacrifice for us and lived the perfect life in our place.

But, God's grace means that the law is a gift to us. It actually shows us how we live out the character of Jesus Christ.

how we are conformed into the image of Jesus Christ. It shows us how to live out Jesus' righteousness. You know, 2 Timothy 3.16 really says it well.

It says, All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness so that the person of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

that is carrying out the character of God. So, you see, no longer is the law a burden. It's a great gift for us to be able to know what it is that we can do to live for Christ.

[16:20] And it corrects us. It reproves us when we stray from the Christ into whose image we are being formed. And so, in that sense, the law is not abolished.

It is very much central in our life. And, in fact, God fits us into the mold of Jesus as we obey his law. So, the first implication of that is character, this new life.

And the second is about a new status. And we need to understand from this passage that the status that we now have in Jesus means that nothing in this world, no status or value can be compared to being in Jesus.

And the way verse 28 puts it this way, and this is a familiar verse to you. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Now, this is probably one of the most badly misused verses in the Bible, recently, anyway. I have often heard it used to promote special rights, for instance, that we should accept different views of sexuality, that we should be simply affirmed in any kind of way of life that we want.

[17:37] It's been used to promote certain agendas as well. But really, the sense of this verse is quite the opposite. It is saying that we have no special rights before God.

Any status we have in this world, anything that makes us look good to one another, anything that elevates us above another, means absolutely nothing to God.

we have no special standing or privilege before God without Jesus Christ. And the opposite is true, too. There is nobody who is too far away from God, who has a status that disqualifies them from putting their faith in Jesus Christ and knowing his transforming power in their life.

And this is the thinking that we need to understand, this godly thinking for our own lives, because we are very tempted to take on the world's values in this area.

We in Canada are rights-driven. We are owed things. We ought to have our agenda be affirmed.

And we are people who, because of our history, really have an ode to us to have special privileges and rights.

[18:50] And in fact, the things that we see important in this world often must keep us from being inconvenienced by the status of being adopted by God.

And what this passage does is to really demolish this thinking. It really takes it down to nothing. It says, nothing we are or do, no status affects us, makes us more acceptable to God.

We are all in the same boat together. And what that boat is, is that we have no rights before God. We are naturally unclean spiritually and he is holy.

Naturally, we are far away from God. We are aliens. He needs to make us his children. And each one of us, even the ones we find the most difficult in our lives, in the church, each one of us depend on Jesus to die for us, to forgive our sins.

In God's grace, he has adopted us and made us his children. Our identity, each one of us, belongs to Jesus alone. And each of us was bought at a price.

[20:00] It wasn't earned. It was something that was given to you and I. And I love the fact that, you know, there's sort of a discomfort I always had when the two of our children were baptized.

People would say congratulations. And I always thought, well, that was kind of strange to do when I did that with people, but it seems natural to do. But the reason I think that it is a good thing to do is because we do congratulate one another when good fortune comes to us, when we receive good blessings even though they weren't deserved.

And that is exactly what has happened to each of us. We have received an extraordinary inheritance that far outweighs anything this world offers. And we ought to be glad for one another. And it ought to humble us. What this means practically is that we must be very humble towards God and one another. that no one is inferior or superior to each other.

When you think about it, that cuts across the grain. If it were not for God's mercy and grace, each of us would be under God's curse. But each of us who have faith in Jesus have been adopted.

[21 : 06] We have this massive inheritance. Look at verse 9. If you are Christ, 29, sorry. If you are Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise.

It causes us to be humble towards God and towards one another. And finally, the last thing that this implication, the implications of this new status gives us is unity.

It gives us a new status, a new character, it gives us a new unity. It comes from this great truth. And I think that we discovered this in the past couple weeks as we prayed for our vestry meeting.

What we discovered is that as we are dependent upon God, as we rely on him in prayer, as we humble ourselves before him, we recognize this deep dependence on his grace and his mercy.

And the result of it is unity. A unity that comes as we gratefully accept what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. What he has done for each of us.

[22 : 06] And we are amazed and we are deeply grateful for his grace. May God grant us this kind of unity. May the unity that comes from knowing that each of us have been adopted change our lives.

May we realize again the incredible status we have only because God is good and he has made us his children, his sons, his daughters.

Amen.