

Our Adoption as Children of God

By Steven Shepard

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” (Gal 4:4-6)

Why was Jesus born? In Galatians 4 we read that Jesus was “born of a woman” to redeem His people in order that they might **“receive the adoption as sons”**. The Scriptural truth of adoption is often overlooked. But it shouldn’t be. It is a wonderful and transforming reality for all believers. The following seven points help explain why.

1. The Greek word for adoption means “the placing as a son.” In the Roman world a father adopted a son to perpetuate his name and to have someone to receive his inheritance. Once adopted, the son’s relationship to his past life was severed and his debts were canceled. He had all the same privileges as if he was born into that family. In the same way, all who believe in Jesus are forever accepted as God’s beloved children. They are given favored sonship status in His family with all the accompanying rights, blessings, and inheritance. Their past debts are also cancelled.

2. Adoption means our heavenly Father loves us as His own children. Just like good earthly parents, God provides for, protects, guides, disciplines, and confirms His love to His children. Yet, because God is perfect and all powerful, His care for His children is perfect! **Everything** that happens to a child of God is an expression of the Father’s love to him and a furthering of His purpose (Romans 8:28, Matt 7:9-11; Heb 12:5-6; Ps 121:7-8; John 17:23-26).

3. Adoption into the family of God is by faith in Christ. Our text says Jesus came “to redeem those who were under the law.” To be under the law as a means of gaining or maintaining God’s favor is to live under a constant sense of failure and condemnation. Galatians 3:26 says, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” A legal spirit brings bondage and fear, but the “spirit of adoption” brings faith, acceptance, security, and freedom (Romans 8:15).

4. Adoption means we have a permanent relationship with our heavenly Father. When earthly children fail their parents, they do not cease to be their children. In the same way God’s children are never “disowned” by their heavenly Father.

Once adopted into our Father’s family, our position as sons and daughters is irrevocable; our relationship fixed and secure. (Rom 8:30) J.I. Packer says it well, “The depressions, randomnesses and immaturities of broken homes are known to us all. But things are not like that in God’s family. There you have absolute stability and security; the parent is entirely wise and good and the child’s position is permanently assured. The very concept of adoption is itself a proof and guarantee of the preservation of the saints, for only bad fathers throw their children out of the family, even under provocation; and God is not a bad father, but a good one.” (Knowing God, p. 209)

5. Adoption is by our heavenly Father's own choice. Some people may think of adoption in a negative light, as if it would make them a second class son or daughter. Yet adopted children are especially chosen by the parents. Only natural children are sometimes not expected or wanted. In the same way ***God chooses to adopt us because He specifically wants us to be His son or daughter.*** In fact, God determined to adopt us as His children in eternity before the foundation of the world! (Eph. 1:4-5, John 15:16; Rom 8:29-31)

6. Adoption is by the grace of our heavenly Father. Earthly parents choose to adopt because of a desirable or favorable quality in the child. God, however, adopts the undesirable, the wretched, and the filthy. Isaiah 64:6a says, "But we are all like an unclean thing." There is nothing in any of us that provides a reason for our adoption. God adopts because of "the good pleasure of His will." (Eph 1:5) In Ephesians 2 we are called "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath". We are worthy only of God's judgment. We are in fact God's enemies. Which one of us would adopt our own enemy and then make this person heir to all we owned?! We had no rights to a position in the King's family and no ability to gain the King's favor. We were abandoned, unwanted, and rejected. And yet, God took us in and gave us a place of honor as His own sons and daughters. This is unmerited favor. (Ezekiel 16:1-14)

7. Our heavenly Father wants His children to know their adoption. Just like good natural parents, God wants His children to know that they are His and that they are loved. This is true of an adopted child in a special way. Earthly parents strive to cause their adopted children to know that they are accepted. The heavenly Father does no less! Our text says, "And because you are sons, God has sent forth the ***Spirit of His Son*** into your hearts, ***crying out, "Abba, Father!"***" Romans 8:15 says, "You received the Spirit of adoption by whom ***we cry out 'Abba, Father.'***" Note that in Galatians it is the Spirit who cries out and in Romans it is the believer that cries. Both are true! The Spirit cries out in our hearts which makes us cry out – that God is our own Father. Romans 8:16 also says, "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The Spirit witnesses with our spirit. This is not just a feeling. We come to discern the marks of our sonship – we believe, we love God, we love our neighbor, and we persevere (1 John 2:3-5, 15-16; 3:10; 4:7-8; 5:1; John 8:31; Eph 1:4). We discern that our life and walk can not possibly be attributed to our human natures (which are corrupted), but must be because of His work in us. God assures us that we really are His children, forgiven, and on our way to heaven - and so we cry out. Note that it is a cry. It is not just a theological declaration. It is fervent and personal. We don't necessarily cry out audibly, but we cry within for joy that we are a child of God!

At Christmas time we remember the birth of Jesus Christ, the fact that God became a man. But let us remember why Jesus was born. Jesus was born to die and redeem a people so that they might be adopted into His own family. Can you hear the Spirit of Adoption in your heart crying out "Abba, Father"? Does your own spirit bear witness that you are His child? If so, then stand fast in the freedom and stability of your relationship with your heavenly Father! Stand tall as His son or daughter. Live to please your Father! If you do not know that you are God's child then believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Scripture says, "...As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name." (John 1:12)