

Adopted Children

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, last week we started a series on adoption, and we asked the question, are we talking about spiritual adoption or are we talking about physical adoption?

! And I said both. You can't talk about one without talking about the other. You can't understand spiritual adoption without having some understanding of physical adoption.

But the reverse is true as well. The doctrine of spiritual adoption teaches us the glory and the goodness of adopting orphans into our family, into caring for those who are the most depressed in our world.

So the goodness of God's love toward us shows us the glory and the goodness of loving others as well. God's grace teaches us to love, and a real practical way of doing that is through adoption. It's not by any means the only way, but it is a real, physical, important way of doing that. So, we said that physical adoption isn't something that we do first and foremost for our own reasons then, because we want a child or because we want to satisfy something in ourselves.

[1:28] Adoption isn't first about us, it's about giving the love of God to others because we have been so loved. We love because we have first been loved. So, last week we had two main points, and the first left some of your heads, some of you scratching your heads, wondering about what was going on or what was being said.

I said last week that adoption is the highest blessing of the gospel. It's the highest privilege of the gospel. It's even better than justification.

And that's where some of you were thinking, I'm having a hard time understanding that. Not just one of you, not just two of you, but a few of you came up to me and said, I'm having a hard time understanding that.

How can that be? And so, this morning I want to go back and talk about that point again. And hopefully I can clarify, and hopefully I can convince you that adoption really is the highest, the best blessing of the gospel.

Now, the thing that I heard most of all was, but without justification, there wouldn't be adoption. Without justification, adoption wouldn't be possible.

[2:44] So, how can we say that adoption is higher than justification? And my answer to them, and my answer to you, and my answer again, is you are absolutely right.

Without justification, there could be no adoption. Justification is the fundamental, the first, the primary, the first thing in the gospel, in the first blessing of the gospel.

And so, it's the door that opens up all the other blessings. It's the door that we come into, that we go through, and it's through that door that we receive all the other blessings of the gospel.

So, I think of Romans 5, verse 1 says, So, justification opens the door into this room of grace that we are now standing in.

It opens the door to all of God's other grace. So, justification is the first. It's the first in order. It's the fundamental, the primary blessing of the gospel.

[4:07] But that is not to say that adoption is not higher. It's not better in one sense. Yes, justification is first. It's the door.

But it leads to a stair, a set of stairs. And on the top of those stairs is adoption. So, in justification, God says, you are right.

You were a sinner. You were guilty and condemned. In justification, God says, you are righteous.

You are declared innocent. You are fully accepted. But in adoption, God becomes our father.

And that's why it's better. Because a judge, this is what I said last week, and I want to reemphasize it. A judge could say to someone, you are righteous.

And that does not necessarily imply that there's a close relationship between the judge and the person. And so, judges say all the time to people on trial, not guilty.

[5:16] But that doesn't mean that the judge has any closeness, any of that sort of fervent love for the person.

But in adoption, God opens up the depths of his fatherly love to us. So, I'm not saying that justification is not a huge sign and a wonderful blessing of God's love to us.

That is the furthest thing from what I'm saying. But in adoption, it implies so much more closeness. It implies so much more than justification does.

In that sense, it's higher. So, he loves us with a fatherly affection. Adoption implies a closeness and fellowship that justification doesn't imply.

So, that's kind of what I mean. I'm not in any way or any sense saying justification doesn't imply love or anything like that. I'm just saying, in adoption, it opens the doors to our understanding of how much God has really loved us.

[6:24] In a higher way than even justification does. So, that was the first point. The second point is that adoption is meant to be the basis for our Christian life.

That doctrine is supposed to filter in throughout our whole life and form a foundation for how we live and what we do. What the Christian life is all about.

So, I gave three big ways that adoption is supposed to shape the Christian life. Do you remember what they were?

Three big ways that adoption is supposed to work its way into our life and change the way we live as Christians. And I drew them all from the Sermon on the Mount. Yes, Mark.

Changes the way we pray. Changes the way we pray. How so? When we address God as our Father and expect certain responses because of that.

[7:27] Yeah. So, we don't pray with lots of words. We don't go babbling like the pagans trying to manipulate our deity, God.

Instead, we ask God as our Father. And so, children don't... Children who are experiencing and who realize that their Father loves them, they don't go on and on about what they want.

They ask. And the Father knows what the children need. He's planned for that. He's thought of that. He's provided that. And so, we're asking for something that we know that God is willing to give us when we pray.

If we're praying for something that is good and right for us. And we know that His fatherly affection will make Him say no to some of our prayers. Because they're not good for us.

And so, it changes the way we pray. And it changes the way that we receive a no when we pray. Because we know that behind the no is not a heart that's unwilling or unloving, but a heart that really does love us.

[8:33] So, it changes the way we pray. What else does it do? Roger. It controls your behavior. It changes the way you behave. How so? Well, the illustration given, which is really great, was God's Father saying, I've forgiven you.

Now, you go and you forgive your enemies. Do what your Father does and be us like sons. Act the way your Father does. Right.

So, Jesus says when He's teaching us how to act as Christians, one of the just basic things He teaches is, do what your Father does. Your Father loves His enemies.

He loves the rain, comes down on the righteous and the unrighteous. So, be like your Father. How else is our adoption supposed to change our conduct? It's not only our imitation.

Yes, Sarah? It changes, well, it's the foundation for our Christian life in that if we became grumbling and disputing and arguing and disappointed and depressed and angry in our Christian walk, then it indicates we're still living as orphans outside the Father's love rather than being here and out of the night.

[9:50] Right. So, I think what you're describing is when we don't trust God. Is that what you're getting at? So, we don't trust God to provide for us.

And so, we complain because we don't think what we have is enough. We're not secure. And so, we're not secure in His love. And Jesus says, you shouldn't be worried about all these sorts of things.

About what you'll eat or drink or what you'll wear. Because your Father knows you need them. And so, our adoption is meant to bolster up our lives and to give us security and trust as we go through

our life.

How else does... How else does... There's two other things that is designed or the adoption does to form the basis of our life.

Not only of our conduct, especially. So, not only do we imitate God, but in all things we want to seek His glory. Remember, we talked about this.

[10:55] That in the ancient world and in most cultures around us, you lived for the honor of your family and of your Father. And so, when Jesus says, glorify your Father in heaven, that made a lot of sense to those people.

Because that's how you lived. Whatever you did, you didn't want to bring dishonor on your Father, on your family. And so, Jesus is saying, whatever you do, do it for Him.

To be... So that people see your good works and praise your Father in heaven. We're to live for the glory of our Father. Because we are children of that Father.

We're in His family. And then, the third thing under the conduct was we're meant to live for His pleasure, to please Him.

Children should naturally want to seek the smile of their Father. It's funny, just yesterday, Eowyn had a soccer game.

[11:59] It struck me because this is exactly what we talked about. And, after the game, she's like, so did I do a good job? And I'm like, yeah, you did a good job.

You really hustled. I'm really proud of you, or something to that effect. And she said, good, I really tried harder this week because I wanted to make you happy. And, you know, I don't know what's behind that.

But that's naturally what children are supposed to do. And Jesus says, you're the child of God. Act like it. Live like that. So, that's a review of what we talked about last week.

If you're interested in more of all that, you want to read something, to a great degree, that Sunday School lesson was taken from J.I. Packer's book, Knowing God.

The chapter is called Sons of God. And so, if you were to go to that and read it, you'd get a lot more detail. He goes into a lot more things. And so, I would recommend that chapter.

[13:03] This morning, we're going to do something a little different. We're going to talk about the background for Paul's use of adoption. The background.

And that's why you have that little piece of paper that we handed out to you. And we're going to get to that in a few minutes. But I want to just talk about that. So, like I said last week, adoption is a metaphor.

It's drawn from a physical reality. And today, we're going to look at what that physical reality is all about. And look at how that should influence the way we think about our adoption.

So, what did Paul have in mind when he applied the idea of adoption to the Christian? What was the background?

The first thing that you need to realize is that it doesn't have really an Old Testament background. Not a whole lot, anyways. It didn't come from the Jewish world.

[14:09] Adoption, as a legal concept, as a legal tool, as a physical reality among people in Israel, it really didn't happen. That's not what they used.

It's not that they never heard of it. They lived in a big world, just like ours, and people did different things. It's not that they never heard of it or anything like that. But adoption just wasn't the legal tool that they used to accomplish the things that other people used adoption to do, if that makes sense. So, adoption in the ancient world, and that's where the metaphor comes from, adoption in the ancient world was not really what we think about adoption today. It wasn't really about the same sort of issues.

So, today, most people think about adoption as a means of giving a child a parent.

A means of giving an orphan child a parent. Of caring for an orphan. But in the ancient world, that was not really what adoption was about.

[15:18] Adoption was about continuing your family line. About keeping the family property in the family line. So, if a man did not have an heir, he did not have a male son, most of all, I guess, to continue the family line, then he had to find some way of doing that.

So, the primary concern in the ancient world, in adoption, was not the care of an orphan. It was instead the welfare of the family and talking about possessions of the family.

So, remember the scene in Genesis chapter 15. God came to Abram and he said, do not be afraid, Abram.

I am your shield, your very great reward. And Abram took that and he thought about that and he said, but God, but, oh sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless?

And the one who will inherit my estate is Eleazar of Damascus. So, Eleazar was Abram's heir.

[16:31] He was going to receive the possessions that Abraham had accumulated over his life when Abram died. Abram was still childless and Eleazar was an heir.

Eleazar wasn't Abraham's son. So, there's no adoption there. That's not what was going on. But you could do what Abram did.

You could just name an heir. But in that case, all your family possessions, you, everything that you had accumulated, everything that God had given you over the lifetime would pass to another person, would pass to another family.

And so, in a sense, you and your family would lose it. And so, that's why Abram has the problem.

Lord, whatever you give me, it's not going to last. It can't mean anything really to me because I don't have a son to give it to.

Someone else is going to get it at the end of the day. So, that's why Abraham says, but what can you give me? So, that was one way. You just name an heir.

[17:39] The other way, what happened if you were young and you died without having an heir in your family? You're a man.

You died before you produced an heir. What did you do then? That's where the concept of Levirate marriage came in. So, you know what we're talking about.

If a man died before he had an heir, before he had a child, his wife was typically given to his brother or his nearest relative.

And the brother was to marry and then to impregnate the woman. And then this is the key part. He was to raise that child in the name of the first father.

The name of, or the first husband, excuse me. So, he would raise the child in the first husband's name. And so, that child wasn't legally his. That child was still legally the first husband's child.

[18:43] And so, he had his last name, so to speak. And so, that child didn't inherit any of his biological father's land. Instead, he inherited the land of his legal father, the first husband.

And that was the way that families kept the land intact. That was the way people passed on things when a man died young. So, what about orphans, someone might say?

How did they fit into this whole picture? Well, they didn't adopt, simply. But that didn't mean there was no orphan care. Men could take orphans into their family and raise them as their children and care for them.

But it was never a real legal transaction in the Jewish world. And so, Job, he's talking about his righteousness. Remember, there's this big dispute about, Job, you've sinned.

And Job's saying, I haven't. And so, Job is talking about the good things that he's done. And Job says, if I've kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless, but from my youth, I reared him as would a father.

[20:00] So, Job said, I took orphans into my family and I provided for them like I was their father. But it still wasn't a legal thing, a legal transaction.

It wasn't like an adoption that we see today. Okay. So, the background is not Jewish. I'm just sort of getting our minds wrapped around the ancient world.

The background was not what we do today. Instead, it's drawn from the Roman legal world. In Roman law, you had something called adoptio.

Sound familiar? It's adoptio. And in Roman adoption, it's Roman adoption that Paul uses to explain what happens when God adopted us into his family.

So, it's interesting. Paul uses the word adoption four times in the New Testament. And in each of those cases, two times he does it in the letter to Rome.

[21:06] One time to Galatia and the other one to Ephesus. So, they're either the Roman city itself or a Roman colony. So, these people that he is talking to are under Roman legal law.

And Paul himself, you remember, is a Roman citizen. And so, this is the legal jurisdiction that he himself is under. And so, this is common ground for them.

So, what happened in Roman adoption? If you take your little piece of paper, it's a long quote. And I wanted you to have it just so that you could see it as I'm reading it.

What happened in a Roman adoption? This is from Francis Lyles, slave citizen, sons, legal metaphors in the epistles. The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state.

And placed in a new relationship of son to his new father, his new paterfamilias. All his old debts were canceled. And in effect, the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family.

[22:26] And from that time on, the paterfamilias had the same control over his new child. And you'll see why that's sort of in those parentheses. As he had over his natural offspring.

He owned all the property and acquisitions of the adoptee. Controlled his personal relationships. And had rights of discipline. On the other hand, the father was liable for the actions of the adoptee. And each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance. So what happened in Roman adoption? Two primary things.

What happens in our spiritual adoption? Two primary things. What's the first one? You can look at the quote. What's the first thing that happened? Our debts were canceled?

Before that. That's right. That's really, that's part of the first thing. What's the first thing? He's taken out of a previous relationship.

[23:29] And in so doing, all of his legal debts were canceled. So the first big thing was, the old family ties were broken. They didn't have, you know, it wasn't like you had visitation rights.

Or something like that. They're broken. They're severed. All legal ties between the first family and the child are completely severed. So, whose family were we in before?

Satan's family. We were slaves. We were slaves to the ruler of the kingdom of air. Slaves in the ancient world were part of the household.

They were sort of the larger family. And so, we were members of Satan's household. We did his work. We spoke his language. He was our father.

So, turn in your Bibles to Ephesians 2. Ephesians chapter 2. And look at verse 12.

[24:46] Although the word adoption is not used here. I think if we understand that Israel originally was a family. And even later on, when it grew into a nation, they called each other brothers.

They were a part of a large, large family. And so, the idea of adoption is here. So, look at verse 12. Remember that at that time, you were separate from citizenship in Israel.

So, we didn't have a name. We didn't have a place in Israel. We weren't part of the larger family of Israel. And foreigners to the covenants of promise. Without hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. Then skip down to verse 19.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens. But fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

[25:53] So, what happened in our adoption? Our family status changed. The old family ties were broken. So, we were in Satan's household.

We were aliens. We were foreigners. We didn't have a place among the brethren. But, through Jesus Christ, we have been brought near. So, the old family ties were broken.

Now, what happened then when the old family ties were broken? Our debts were canceled. The old obligations were taken away.

They were canceled. So, the new father in Roman adoption paid the debts of the son. Of the new son.

The new father paid for the old debts of his new son. And so, we are no longer legally bound to our old debts.

[26:50] To our old obligations. To our old way of life. That has been cut off. So, God didn't. And God didn't just forgive us with divine fiat.

You know, he didn't say, I forgive you. Or your debts are canceled just because I say so. There's always red tape in adoption. There's always legal hang-ups and problems.

So, in Colossians 2.14, he says, He nailed the bill of our guilt to the cross.

The written code with its regulations that was against us. That stood opposed to us. He took it away, nailing it to the cross. He wrote paid in full as he nailed it to the cross.

And so, our old debts were taken away. And so, there's always this red tape in adoption. That was then. That's now. And so, in Roman adoption, part of the red tape was the existing debts of the adoptee.

[27:58] Now, this is where it's very different from our world. Because normally, orphans, people that are adopted in our world, are children. They're people without debts.

But in the Roman world, it was almost always grown men that were adopted into the family. That were brought in to receive the inheritance and so forth. And those grown men had liabilities. They had lived. They had debt. And so, how did the new father cut through the tape? Well, at his own expense.

And so it is with us. God cut through the red tape of our adoption. He paid for our debts at his own expense. And we had debts that only blood could pay for.

Only blood could pay for them. Not with silver or gold have you been redeemed. But with the precious blood of Jesus. And so, at the cost of his one and only son, God paid our debts.

[29:00] And when he did, he freed us from our old family. All the old ties, all the chains that bound us to that old family, all the legal things that kept a hold of us.

He took it away. Now, secondly, this is the flip side. He broke the old ties. And then, in adoption, it involved joining a new family.

It's the beginning of a new life. It was like life started over. It was a second chance completely. New father, new family, new resources, new legal obligations.

And so, we started a new life and a new family. And now, all the privileges of the new family belong to us. So, what privileges?

Jesus calls us brothers. That's a privilege. He calls us brothers. He's not ashamed to call us brothers. Sometimes, small, selfish people are ashamed to call their siblings their siblings.

[30:10] Remember the parable of the prodigal son. The older brother said, that son of yours. He didn't call him his brother. He said, that son of yours. I'm disowning him.

Sometimes, small people, selfish people, are embarrassed to own their siblings. But then, sometimes, you do see people who have siblings with disabilities. And they still say, you know what?

That's my brother. That's my sister. And that's what Jesus is like. He's not small-hearted and selfish. He reaches out his arms and he says, those are my brothers.

They have lots of problems, but they're my brother. That's my sister. What privileges? Well, now we call God our Abba, our Father.

The word Abba is Aramaic, and I've explained this a few times, I know. That's the language that Jesus spoke. When Jesus prayed, he said Abba.

[31:14] And throughout the Greek New Testament, that word goes untranslated. It's not like there's not a word for it. It's the word Father. And oftentimes, they say Abba, Father.

So they want you to know what they're talking about. But they leave the word Abba there untranslated. Because those were the words that Jesus used. That's the word that Jesus used. That intimacy is something that now we share.

And so now the Spirit within us teaches us, telling us, helping us to say Abba. That's our privilege. So the same kind of intimacy the Father and Jesus had, we are invited into.

We are brought into that circle, into that family, where we call Abba, Father. And that's not thinking of ourselves higher than we ought.

That's not some sort of getting uppity with God or getting, you know, informal or something. I don't know. It's not evangelical light or superficial.

[32:19] It's none of those things. It's not like, you know, where you're just not serious enough about God that you could say that. That sort of intimacy is the gift of the Holy Spirit.

God gives us the Spirit. He wants us to experience that privilege of feeling the same way that Jesus felt about God the Father. Where we can say to Him, Abba, Father.

Now this brings us back to 1 John 3.1. 1 John 3.1. We looked at it last week. See, when we, what I'm talking about is we receive, this is the privilege, we receive all the love of God as our Father.

We receive that fatherly love. And this is what we looked at 1 John 3.1. In the NIV it says, how great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called children of God.

And that is what we are. Now, the NIV leaves out a word. It leaves it just left out for some reason.

[33:35] At the beginning of the verse is the word, see. See what kind of love the Father has given to us. See how great this love is. John says there's something that we need to see.

There's something we need to look at. There's something that if we don't focus our attention on seeing, we will miss it. We'll have a hard time comprehending it, seeing it.

And that's the adopting fatherly love of God. So we come into the Father's family with an eye problem. We come into God's family having a hard time seeing how great His love for us is. That's how orphans always are when they're brought into a family. They don't initially trust the Father. They don't initially think and understand that the Father and the Mother have the best of intentions, that they are full of love for them.

They don't see it. And John says, we have to have our eyes wide open to that or we'll miss it. So a lot of times we have our eyes wide open to our sin.

[34 : 54] We have our eyes wide open to our work, the things that we need to do or the things that we have done. And so we can naturally start feeling like that older brother in the prodigal son story.

His father, you know, he says to his father, see, look at how I've been slaving for you. He said, look what I'm about. The older brother had his eyes wide open to his work.

That was what was important. I've been slaving for you and I've never disobeyed your orders. So his eyes were on himself, his work, but it wasn't on his father's love.

It wasn't on that at all. He lived like a slave in his father's house and it was a slavery of his own doing. He put the chains on his own arms and he lived that way. So John says, look, look at the great love of the father that we should be called the sons of God.

John Cotton. Cotton was the most influential, one of the most influential preachers among the founding fathers. So in colonial America.

[36 : 01] And this is what he says about first John three, one, and especially the word see. He says this reproves men's squint looking. They do not look at God's love, but at themselves and at their own corruptions and afflictions.

It is a wonder that God's child should pour only upon their corruptions and not consider what love it is for God to find them and to pardon them.

So let me ask you, do you have a squinting problem? Do you look at squint eye at God's love? You're half blind to it.

Not sure of it. Can't see it. But your eyes are all of your sin, open to your sin, open to your afflictions. And John Cotton says, look, look at God's love.

Look at it. The apostle John says, look at God's love. He calls you sons. He puts the spirit of Christ into you to teach you to feel and to know that you are a son of God.

[37 : 07] He wants that intimacy. Or listen to John Owen. And he's talking about what it is to have communion with God our father, communion and love with him.

And listen closely and see if you can find yourself here. I know I find myself here a lot. And this is a fairly long quote, but if you could listen closely.

First, then, this is a duty where it's most evident that Christians are but little exercised. That means they don't do it very much. Namely, holding immediate communion with the father in love.

Unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges, is our sin as well as our trouble. Let me repeat that. Unacquaintedness with our mercies, our privileges, is our sin as well as our trouble.

We listen not to the voice of the spirit which is given to us that we may know the things that are freely bestowed on us from God. And that makes us go heavily when we might rejoice.

[38 : 23] And to be weak where we might be strong in the Lord. How few of the saints are experimentally acquainted with this privilege of holding immediate communion with the father in love.

With what anxious, doubtful thoughts do they look upon him? What fears, what questions are there of his goodwill and kindness? At the best, many think there is no sweetness at all in him toward us. But what is purchased at the high price of the blood of Jesus? It is true. That alone, the cross alone, is the way of communication. But the free fountain and spring of all is in the bosom of the father. Eternal life was in the father and is manifested unto us. Then he says, let us then, I, the father, as love.

Look at the father as love. Look not to not on him as always a lowering father, but as one most kind and tender.

[39 : 33] Let us look on him by faith as one that has had thoughts of kindness toward us from everlasting. They fixed their thoughts only on his terrible majesty, severity and greatness.

And so their spirits are not endeared. Would a soul continually eye his everlasting tenderness and compassion, his thoughts of kindness that have been from of old, his present gracious acceptance.

It could not bear on ours absence from him. Let then this be the saints first notion of the father as one full of eternal, free love toward them.

Do you see what John Owen is saying? So many Christians live with an orphan heart, an orphan spirit.

What doubts, he says. What anxieties. They deep down have a hard time believing that they belong, that they're part of the family.

[40 : 41] That all the privileges of this family are theirs. And so what is the cure? Look. Look at the father's love.

That's what John Owen says. That's what John Cotton says. That's what the apostle John says.

The three Johns are all in agreement. They say, look. Experience.

Feel it. Enjoy this love. This is your privilege because you are in God's family. The old is gone. The new has come. And so you can call him Abba Father.

And know that he loves you. So the old family ties are broken. The old debts are paid. The old obligations are gone.

And you've been brought into the father's family. And into his fatherly love. Well, we are out of time.

[41 : 39] We are dismissed. We are dismissed.