

True Brothers and Sisters

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[0:00] One of the highlights of our second trip to Ethiopia happened on the plane ride back.!

I've had the glorious privilege of saying these words, I am his mother. And that was special to Stephanie. And I don't know if that passenger had worked out that we had adopted Cademan or not, or whether she was talking about his biological mother.

But the reality is now is that Steph is his mother. The old relationship is broken. His first mother is gone.

She's out of the picture. And Steph is Cademan's mommy. Now, adoption causes people to wonder about things.

It's so different than what and how the world traditionally thinks, the way we normally think, the way I normally would think. People have a hard time understanding the reality of physical adoption and spiritual adoption because we're almost programmed by our culture and by our own flesh to think that biology is the deciding and the highest factor in how families are made.

[1:48] And so they have a hard time believing that adoption is more than a legal fiction, something that we're pretending or it's just a legal thing, but not something that's real.

Russell Moore is the dean, is a dean at Southern Seminary. He adopted two boys out of a Russian orphanage about eight or nine years ago. And the boys are only two or three weeks apart or so.

And Russell and his wife got the boys at the same time. And in his book, *Adopted for Life*, he talks about how people were always asking him, Are they brothers?

Are they brothers? And his answer was, it is, yes, they are brothers. And the person would come back, no, I mean, are they really brothers?

And he says, clenching my jaw and repeating the beatitudes to myself silently in my mind, I coolly responded, yes, now they are both our children.

[2:57] So they are now really brothers. And the woman sighed, rolled her eyes and said, well, you know what I meant. He goes on to say, of course, we didn't know what she meant.

She was wondering whether these two boys born three weeks apart share a common biological ancestry, a common bloodline, some common DNA.

And it struck me that this question betrayed what most of us tend to view as really important when it comes to sonship. Traceable genetic material.

And so adoption cuts against the grain of what we normally think about sonship and about having children, about sons and daughters and families.

Because what do we normally think about? We think about common biological material. Traceable DNA.

[3:56] And that's the reason probably that woman on the airplane didn't see the three of us sitting there as a family. A family basically in her mind, probably, I'm just guessing, was shared biological material.

Cademan's mom can't be a tall, pale redhead. And the world says, no way, that just doesn't happen. And adoption says, yes, it does happen.

And this presupposition, this way of thinking shows itself in various ways. Sometimes when people, you know, they see us and it makes people talk to us.

And they say things like, well, we are thinking about adopting after we have some of our own. We're thinking about adopting after we have some of our own.

Do you see the presupposition? The assumption that's behind that response? That adoption is just sort of a legal fiction. That adopted children aren't as much your child, your child, as a biological child.

[5:17] Adoption is a nice thing to do if biology doesn't work out or someday you have time for it or something like that. As if the adopted child was just the protege.

The tag along. But not really the real full deal. Now, I don't want anyone to mistake what I'm saying or what I'm trying to say.

I couldn't care less whether you have biological children, adopted children, first, last, middle. That's not the point. And I don't care if even God never calls you to adoption.

It's not for everyone. Even if it is for everyone at least to think about. Adoption, adopted children are not over or more special than biologically produced children.

Eowyn, Phoebe, Cademan, they came to us in different ways. But none of them are more or less our children. But adopted children are not plan B.

[6:18] They're not charity cases, protégés, tag along, second thoughts. To think that they are. To somehow make that distinction that is in our heads so often.

That, well, we'll think about this after we have some of our own. But it's a denial of the gospel.

I'm going to explain what I mean. It's not a blatant one. And I'm not saying if you think that way, you can't be saved or anything like that. But it is a subtle denial of the reality of the gospel.

You see, God built his family not on biology, but on a promise. So we went to the courts in Ethiopia and we became a family.

Cademan came into our family by a promise. Now, if you think about it, a husband and a wife, they share no biological material. And yet they promise to each other and they become a family.

[7:25] God built his family based on a promise, too. And so those who are in Christ are brought into the family. Biology isn't important.

God's promises and physical adoption is a picture of that. Remember, we can't understand one without the other. And so the question that we want to look at today is physical and spiritual adoption.

Is this a real family? Or is this a legal fiction? Is this something that we're just pretending? You know, like it is true just because the courts say it's true, but it's not really, really true.

So, you know, legally Cademan's our child, but well, not really. Or is he real family? Is he a real son? Son. So what's more important, a promise or biology?

Or is this real or is this just a legal fiction? Now, that's not a new question. It's not a new question at all. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul refers, raises this issue of adoption.

[8:34] But before he does, we're not going to turn there. It's in Romans 8. We've looked at it several times. He says he calls the people that he's writing to brothers. Brothers. He's writing to brothers.

Now, brothers and sisters, I love when I refer to you. I love to call you that when I'm speaking because we are a family. We are a family.

And I address you like that because we are a family. And we are a family. Grace Fellowship is a family not put together by biology or by something that the flesh has accomplished or something that in the will of man we've decided, but by adoption, by a common promise, by God's work.

Now, so have you thought of that? We really and indeed are brothers and sisters. And the family that we share here is more lasting.

And even more real than the biological families that we have. Because this family, 10 million years from now, is going to be together.

[9:46] So we can call each other brother and sister not because that's just the Christian lingo, but because it's really true. You know, maybe we don't see that so much, you know, because it does get lost in the Christian lingo and it loses its it's it's.

And so you say when you forget someone's name, oh, brother, how are you? Or, you know. Ladies, maybe you have to tell a certain brother that you're not really interested in him.

And you say, I can't marry you, Bob, but I love you like a brother in Christ. And that man feels dandy. Now, the churches in the first century coming out of Judaism.

They wouldn't have made those kinds of mistakes. The word brothers wouldn't have lost its emphasis. They would have felt truly how really amazing and real this is.

Remember, how did Israel start out? Let me ask you, how did the nation of Israel start out? And then he had Isaac and Isaac had Jacob and Jacob had.

[10:58] He had 12 sons. Israel started out as 12 brothers. They were the sons of Israel. And so Israel, the Israel of God began as a family.

And so read as you read through the Pentateuch, as you read through the books of Moses, you see everywhere it's calling fellow Israelites brothers. And everyone else. Are alien strangers and other things.

There was a distinction between the brothers and the people who weren't brothers. And that's why Jesus parable of the Good Samaritan. It's it was so mind blowing and out of.

Sync with what the Jews normally thought to love your neighbor was to love your brother. It wasn't to love some Gentile. And it certainly wasn't that for some Gentile to love you.

And so it's hard for us to feel the power of that word brother, the brother language in Paul, because none of us really think of ourselves as Gentiles.

[12:06] You know, when I'm thinking about who I am. In my identity today, I don't think it has. I don't think.

That, you know, it doesn't go into my active processing that who I am today has something to do with something so private as whether I was circumcised on the eighth day or not, or if I was from this tribe or that tribe, Gentiles is a word that stuck back in Bible times almost.

So we think of ourselves as Americans and Australians or Englishmen or Republicans or Democrats or white or black or middle class or lower class or upper class.

You know what we do, factory worker, manager, business owner. But we don't think of ourselves as Gentiles or uncircumcised.

But put yourself back in the first century in the church. Put yourself in Rome. You live in a very different world then. You live in a very different age.

[13:13] There's no electricity. There's no lights. There's no telephone. There's no TV. There's no planes or cars. There's no Internet. You probably have never been more than 10 miles away from Europe from the place where you were born.

And you've grown up in your family where your dad was the paterfamilias. Your honor. We talked about this. Your honor, your dignity, your financial status, the work that you were going to do.

All your prospects. That all came from your family. From who you were related to. But now, your family doesn't talk to you.

You've lost your job. You've been caught up in some foreign cult where you worship this Jewish insurrectionist. Who everyone says died and he came back.

And you never forget what your mom asked you when the day she kicked you out. And she asked, you know, do you and your friends really eat human flesh and drink blood?

[14:22] So, you're a freak. You're a pariah. You're a man without a family now. And then you arrive at a home where the pastor stands up and he reads Paul's letter to the Romans and he says, brothers.

Brothers. Now, how precious would that be to you? The family that you had before is pretty much gone. It would be very precious to you.

But then the question comes. And it comes up repeatedly and it comes up repeatedly in the New Testament. But but are these Gentiles really brothers? Have they gone all the way?

Have they done everything that they need to do? And the question went like this. Yes, we know they're brothers. We know they believe in Jesus. But are they really brothers? Have they been circumcised?

You know, have they made their way into the 12 brothers of Israel? You know, because the Old Testament makes it pretty clear repeatedly.

[15:26] Those who are uncircumcised are to be cut off. The uncircumcised were often the enemies. The others, the aliens, the strangers. And so, yeah, we can call them brothers.

But are they really 100 percent brothers? And repeatedly, the New Testament answer is that circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing. What matters is a new creation.

And so repeatedly, the New Testament's answer is that Israel of God now is determined by who's attached to Jesus. The true Israel of God.

Biology has nothing to do with it. Outward similarity has nothing to do with it. And even the Old Testament had hints of that along the way.

That faith was the really important thing, not circumcision. It was promise. It wasn't the biology that was ultimately important.

[16:27] And I want you to think about it first by thinking. There was a common problem that came up in the Old Testament repeatedly. Whenever God was about to do something, when he was

about to advance his covenant of grace, his promises, his plan to save a people, there was often a biological problem that came up.

Do you know what it was? Do you think of what it was? Abraham had a wife. Her name was Sarah. But what was wrong with Sarah? Abraham. She was barren. And Isaac had a wife named Rebecca. And she was barren. And Rachel was barren. And repeatedly, God is making it clear that my kingdom, my plan of salvation, how things are going to be done in my kingdom, it's not going to be determined by flesh and blood.

It's not going to be determined by normal biological processes. That's the first thing. It was the promise. God promised to Abraham and Sarah, I will give you a son.

And remember, Sarah was as good as dead. And God delivered. Now, turn over to Ephesians chapter 2. Ephesians chapter 2.

[17:53] And this goes back to the Jewish Gentile issue. It was promise. It wasn't biology that was ultimately important.

Verse 11. We're going to read through verse 19. Therefore, remember that formerly you, who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, that done in the body by the hand of men.

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the 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. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace. And in this way, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

[19:10] He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him, we both have access to the father by one spirit.

For through him, consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household.

You see how the gospel undercuts this worldly way of thinking that says, But where's his mother? But are they brothers? Where's his real mom? We'll think about this after we have some of our own. In Christ, indeed and really.

Those who are brought near our family, they are brought into God's household. And it's not just a legal fiction. It's not just something that is sort of plastered over and it's not as real.

[20:14] It's not some sort of pretend game. In Christ, our old life is crucified. And in Christ, our old family ties are broken.

Our old identity is gone. We are sons of God. And to make it depend upon circumcision, to make it depend upon common biology, DNA, to say that our adoption into God's family is anything less than real.

Is to deny the gospel. And that's why Paul gets so furious about people insisting on circumcision. Circumcision answers the question.

Are you a part of the family? Are you a part of Israel? Are you a part of God's family? Are you one with us? Are you in the covenant? And it answers it without reference to Christ.

So the Jewish believer who prized circumcision and said, you really you need to be circumcised to be really in, to really be in all the way in.

[21:19] We're seeing themselves apart from Jesus. It was a lack of faith. It was a lack of repentance. It was to hold on to the old ways of thinking about who we are and to identify ourselves by what we are in the flesh.

And the circumcision done by the hands of men. It was to think of their identity. More or less, you know, in a lot more religious way, but more or less.

The same as the world, because the world identifies themselves and determines who's in and out by what the flesh does, what it looks like, what is accomplished.

Who your ancestors. Now, Paul says. You know, that's how I used to think. But I don't think that way anymore. Turn a couple of pages over to Philippians chapter three.

Philippians chapter three. Verse four B. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh. I have more.

[22:25] Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel. Of the tribe of Benjamin. A Hebrew of the Hebrews. In regard to the law.

A Pharisee. As for zeal. Persecuting the church. As for legalistic righteousness. Faultless. But whatever was to my profit.

I now consider a loss. For the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss. Compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord.

For whose sake. I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish. That I might. That I may gain Christ. And be found in him. Not having a righteousness of my own.

That comes from the law. But that which is through faith in Christ. The righteousness that comes. From God. And is by faith. Paul's saying.

[23:24] All the old things that used to identify me. All the old things that I used to depend upon. To make sure that I was right with God. That I was in the right group of people. That I could trust.

To have the right standing with God. My Jewishness. My circumcision. My ancestry. My Pharisee. My works of law keeping.

And legalistic righteousness. All that. All that I had accomplished. All that I was. By the flesh. All that I was. I have considered it all loss.

It's all. It's not. It's not that it's just worthless. It's actually a loss. It was something that was keeping me. From finding true righteousness.

It all had to be a loss. In the glory of Jesus Christ. And so. Christ. Has become our. Life. And so in him. We have a new identity.

[24:24] A new family. We aren't what we used to be. And it has nothing to do. With who we are. In the flesh. Has nothing to do with what. We could accomplish.

And it doesn't have anything to do. With what we looked like. Or where we came from. And it's all because of God's. Adopting.

Love. He sent his son. Seek. And save. The lost. And that's the reason. That I'm in God's name. Really in God's name.

So imagine for a moment. That you. Are adopting a child. And you've gone through. All the home study stuff. You've been approved.

And one day. You've been waiting. Excitedly. One day. You finally get a phone call. And you drive down. To a little. County office.

[25:25] Downtown. To meet. Your social worker. And you sit down. And. She says. Well. We have a 12 year old. We have a 12 year old.

Here for you. And she goes through. His case file. He's been in and out of. Therapy. Counseling. Since he was three.

But he still. Persists. On burning things. And he still. Wants to hurt animals. And he acts out. Sexually. But. She doesn't really tell you. What that means. And she goes through. His family history. And the boy's father. And the boy's grandfather.

And the boy's great grandfather. They all have histories. Of violence. From spousal abuse. To murder. Half of them. Have committed suicide. Now think for a minute.

[26:23] Would you want that child? If you did adopt him. Wouldn't you keep an eye on him? Especially when he was.

With other children. And when you set the table. Would you give him a night? Would you leave him alone. With your daughter? With your father? Well.

The Bible's answer. Is he's you. And he's me. And. The Bible says. That our birth father. Has fangs. And when we act out. We act out like our father. The devil. And when we speak. We speak like him. And when we do. What we want to do. We do what he. Wants us to do. And so.

Now. If. If we are adopted. Into God's family. It's not because of anything. In us. It wasn't because we were lovely. It wasn't because we had accomplished anything. It wasn't because of who we were. And our past was so great.

[27:21] And our ancestry. And our flesh. And our DNA. And. And all that. Had nothing to do with what the flesh could bring about. It was all of grace. And our adoption came by God's free promise.

His grace to us. And so you see why this is so important. When. This question. Are they brothers? Where's the real mom?

Where's the real dad? God. Because if we can't say that my real dad. My real father. Is God. Then I'm still outside the family. And I'm still outside of Christ.

And I'm still in Satan's household. And I'm without God. And I am without hope. We're right back. To where we are. If we're not all the way in. We are not saved.

But. By God's grace. I'm not what I used to be. Not who I used to be.

[28 : 21] My adoption isn't a legal fiction. God isn't playing pretend. We really are. The sons and daughters of God. Brothers and sisters of Christ. And so with one another.

And the spirit of God testifies. That I am God's child. And so now. My life. Is one long. Walking away.

From who I used to be. It's one long. Walking away. From my old life. My old identity. My old family. My old father. My old master. The old household.

And my life is now. One long. Walking. Into Christ. Into becoming. More. Of who I am in him. My new family. My new life. And. This is why.

Adoption is so. Is exciting to me. Because adoption is a picture. Of that grace. It's a picture of God's free grace.

[29 : 19] See. When you see a child. That doesn't look like his mom and dad. Who doesn't share in the biology. Of his parents. Or her parents. You see a picture of the gospel. You see a picture of grace.

You see that there are. There's something called a second chance. Where we're not stuck. Being. Who we were. They're starting over. There's a new life. A new family.

And you see. That. That grace. Is stronger. Than biological. Tithes. And a promise. Is thicker. Than. Blood. And you see that God's grace. Is stronger than the flesh. See where sin abounded. Grace much. More. Abounded. And you see. God's undeserved.

A picture of God's undeserved love. And. That gospel. Turns the world. And it's thinking. And it's way of doing things. And it. Turns it all on its head.

[30 : 16] So the world wants to divide. Black and white. Rich and poor. It wants to divide the good. And the bad. It wants to divide. And divide. And divide. And then label.

And label. The young and the old. The cool and the uncool. The. The. On and on we go. But in Christ. Everything that the world divides.

Is. Is brought together. And adoption. Is a beautiful picture. Of that redemptive reality. Adoption. Takes us from. The tower of Babel. Where everything is divided.

And we speak different languages. And we spread out. And we go all sorts of different ways. And it brings us. To Pentecost. Where we're. Where the languages are brought together again.

Where. Where unity is restored. That's what the gospel. Does. So every Friday. I. Go to the public library.

[31 : 17] Dare's never there on Friday. Every Friday. I go to the public library. And. There's this little homeschooling co-op. That meets there.

While I'm there. I don't meet with them. I'm not really affiliated with them. In any way. Okay. And. The first time I saw. Saw it.

I was like. What is. Going on. Because. All of a sudden. And if you lived in Plymouth. Well you live. A lot of you live in Bremen.

So you know what I'm talking about. All of a sudden. There were all these Asian kids. And all these black kids. In the library. And in Plymouth. You know. That. That doesn't happen.

The proportions are very established. And. You wouldn't see that many Asians. And blacks. In one place. At one time. Well. Come to find out. All these kids. Are from one family.

[32 : 14] That family. Has adopted. Eight children. Four of them from Asia. So. A couple from Thailand. And a couple from Vietnam. And four of the children.

Are. Black. And they're from Texas. And their parents are white. So they sit together. They work together. They live together.

They share the same name. They're brothers and sisters. They are family. And it's. Not pretend. It's real. And so they're a beautiful picture.

Of. God's. Grace. They're a beautiful picture. Of. Christ's family. Who. Made up. Blacks. And whites. And Asians. All sorts of different kinds of people.

Different economic. Economic. Economic. Levels. And. That's why. I'm not ashamed to. To ask you to think about. Adopting yourself.

[33 : 11] Adoption is a living picture. Of. The gospel. And it shows that there's something more. Important. Than flesh. There's something more important. Than.

Appearances. There's something stronger. Than what. Man. Can do. On his own. There's grace.
There's grace. There's grace to bring unity.
There's grace to restore. What has been broken. Thank you.