

Adoption

It is interesting that a concept which is central to our understanding of the nature of our redemption, as Brother Chris taught us last week, and that is one of the things borne witness to by the resurrection, that Brother Clint taught in the Basics of the Faith class, is mentioned so little in the Bible. However, while the word “adopt” and its variants are only found six times in the whole Bible. Like the Trinity, a term not even found in Scripture, adoption is a concept that is found throughout the Bible.

Another interesting fact is that there is no word in Hebrew that translates directly as “adoption”. This is not so odd, however, when we look at the Old Testament and the Israelite culture. Remember, Israel is actually one big family (as we all are, really) and conducted itself that way, at least within each of the so-called “tribes”. Part of that system of family relationships was the model for what Christ did for us: the kinsman redeemer! Essentially, in many situations, that “redemption” would take the form of what we would call “adoption”.

There are numerous instances in the Old Testament, written in Hebrew for the most part, that describe situations of that nature, but that term is only used in the New Testament. Some of the times it is used discuss those very instances in the Old Testament. One of those is in Acts chapter seven, when Stephen is recounting Israel’s history and comes to the account of Moses’ birth and adoption by Pharaoh’s daughter: Acts 7:20-21

Look at how it is actually recorded in Exodus: Exodus 2:10

Similarly, in another well-known story that includes “adoption” we see this: Esther 2:5-7

One passage that actually speaks to *our* adoption in terms of our redemption is found in Romans: Romans 8:14-17

This passage speaks to us about one of the most wonderful aspects of the work that God does in the life of those He has chosen to set His love upon. If God has set His love upon you, His Spirit not only has given you spiritual life, He dwells within you! If He dwells within you, the life He has given you is eternal life!

Those who have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them follow Him and are called sons and daughters of God! Remember what John said in his Gospel? John 1:9-13

We have learned about being born again. That is what John is talking about here. Only those who have been born again can truly believe in Jesus with a saving faith. Those are the ones that are given “the right to become children of God”. Through the miracle of the New Birth, we are given a new nature, or as was prophesied in the Old Testament, a new heart: Ezekiel 36:24-27

The Apostle Paul, in the Romans passage we read, referred to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit YHWH promised to put within us, in a unique way as he described what has happened to us at the new birth: Romans 8:15

He refers to the Holy Spirit as the “Spirit of adoption”! Then he says that it is by the Holy Spirit that we cry to God, “Father!” The term Paul uses here, “Abba”, is a form that denotes a very close and familiar relationship. It is the term Mark recorded that Jesus used when He prayed to God-the-Father in the garden of Gethsemane: Mark 14:36

Paul also refers to this in the Book of Galatians: Galatians 4:1-7

One important aspect of our becoming children of God is this idea of becoming heirs. In this passage, we see the idea that we were once slaves, - that is slaves to sin - but we were adopted into the family of God and became co-heirs with Jesus! Let’s look at the historical context of *first century* adoption to get a picture of what happens when believers in Jesus Christ are adopted into God’s family.

In Rome, adoption was a legal process that made a child part of a family, but more than that, the family loved and cared for the child unconditionally as if it were their own, just as a redeemed person was in ancient Israel. Paul describes our relationship with God in the same terms. God adopts those He has given the gift of faith in His son, Jesus Christ.

Through Christ, we're made heirs with Him to all of God's blessings; and, because we're secure in Christ, nothing can separate us from God! Because those who are in Christ are His children, God loves us unconditionally and will protect and care for us. This is all expressed in our passage: Romans 8:16-17

Paul also says that the whole of creation, interestingly enough, is awaiting the fulfillment of adoption along with us: Romans 8:20-23

Did you notice what Paul said there? We have the "firstfruits of the Spirit". What does that mean?

I think we can get an idea from another of Paul's letters: Ephesians 1:13-14

The Holy Spirit, dwelling in the Believer, is our guarantee that we will receive the inheritance promised to us as adopted children of YHWH. This guarantee is spelled out in the last verses of the Romans passage: Romans 8:28-30

Those who love God because they have been born again and have the "firstfruits of the Spirit" have been "called according to His purpose", "predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son", are His "many brothers [and sisters]", have been justified and glorified. Now, that doesn't mean that Believers are already fully conformed to the image of Christ, nor are we glorified. That is why Paul says, "...we wait eagerly for adoption..." It is as though the adoption papers have been signed, but we have a waiting period before the adoption is finalized.

However, because we have the guarantee of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, it is as though we already were conformed to Christ's image in God's sight! One day, we will truly be fully conformed! That will be the day of "the redemption of our bodies," as Paul says: at the resurrection.

This topic is very dear to my heart. As some of you may know, I was adopted. When I was adopted into my earthly family, I became heir to all my parents owned. My adoptive parents were simple working people. My father was a mechanic and my mother worked most of my early life as a bank employee. They didn't have much, but what they had would one day be mine.

In Paul's time, many adoptions were for the express purpose of providing an heir. In fact this had been a practice for centuries throughout the known world. Take Abram, for example; when YHWH told him that he would become the father of a great nation, what was his response? Genesis 15:2-3

Of course, YHWH had other plans and told Abram something that we look to as the promise of our becoming children of God: Genesis 15:4-6

For us as Christians this is the promise that we have become heirs to the riches of the One who has adopted us! Galatians 3:24-29

Did you catch that last phrase? We are "heirs according to promise"!

You see, having an heir wasn't just about having someone to leave your belongings to. It was also about having someone to fulfil the family responsibilities, as well as ensuring that there was someone to carry on your family name, which was of the utmost importance in that day.

Remember what happened when Boaz wanted to redeem Naomi's husband's land and marry Ruth? There was another man that had what we might call "right of first refusal" in redeeming Naomi's land. He was willing to redeem her, but when he realized that doing so would mean that her offspring (in this case her daughter-in-law Ruth) would have a share in *his* inheritance, he refused. (Ruth 4:1-6)

Unlike that kinsman redeemer, Jesus is willing to share His inheritance with us! In fact, He made the decision to do that before creation, as we saw in Romans, chapter 8: Romans 8:29

In that redemption, He has changed us from sons and daughters of Adam and made us into His own children. Colossians 1:11-14

In redeeming us, God made us heirs to an everlasting inheritance: 1 Peter 1:3-5

This is what we are called to: the redeeming of our bodies to eternal life! Just as Jesus' human body was resurrected and glorified, so will ours be! 1 John 3:2

That is the living hope we have as Christians; a hope that no one else can have. It is "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Not only is our inheritance imperishable (it can never go away), undefiled (it is untouched by sin) and unfading (it will never be anything less than perfect), but Peter says something else interesting about it. It is being kept in heaven *for* us, but, and this is the really important part, it is *us* who "are being guarded through faith"!

Look what Paul tells us in the verses following the passage we looked at earlier: Romans 8:31-39

In ancient times, if one of the parties to an adoption revoked the agreement, the penalty was usually a minimum of loss of the estate. That meant that if a parent tried to disown an adopted child, the child would receive the estate immediately, or if an adopted child wanted to leave the family, they would give up all rights to the estate.

However, if we are God's children, we are secure in our inheritance. Because we're secure in Jesus, nothing can separate us from God.

One commentator described the understanding of the concept of adoption in the first century like this:

"The process of legal adoption by which the chosen heir became entitled not only to the reversion of the property but to the civil status, to the burdens as well as the rights of the adopter—became, as it were, his other self, one with him ... this too is a Roman principle, peculiar at this time to the Romans, unknown, I believe, to the Greeks, unknown, to all appearance, to the Jews, as it certainly is not found in the legislation of Moses, nor mentioned anywhere as a usage among the children of the covenant. We have but a faint conception of the force with which such an illustration would speak to one familiar with the Roman practice; how it would serve to impress upon him the assurance that the adopted son of God becomes, in a peculiar and intimate sense, one with the heavenly Father"

(Conversion of the Roman Empire. (Vincent, M. R. (1887). Word studies in the New Testament (Vol. 3, p. 91). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.)

This certainly is the central idea of the value of our adoption. As Jesus prayed for His Disciples and us: John 17:20-23

Remember, it was this idea that He was "One" with the Father that almost got Jesus stoned at one point: John 10:30-31

Adoption as sons and daughters of YHWH makes us one with Him through Christ!

While this doctrine is not specifically addressed in our Statement of Faith or Distinctives, I believe it is included in the portion dealing with Justification: "...Justification consists in the pardon of sin and the promise of eternal life...and secures every other blessing needful for time and eternity."

If we are Believers, we should thank God for adopting us as His children and loving us unconditionally. Because of Jesus, we are secure in Him and nothing can ever separate us from Him. We should always pray that we will live as obedient and loving children.

Think about this: we are adopted as children of God and we are His heirs! An heir inherits the things of his or her father; in this case God the Father. This means we inherit of all the riches of God's kingdom! Most amazingly, we inherit salvation and eternal life!

We should continually thank God for adopting us as His children. As Christians, we're waiting for the return of Jesus and the completion of our inheritance—the completion of our salvation. While we're adopted now, our adoption will be fully complete when we are resurrected to eternal life.

As the Apostle John put it: 1 John 3:1-2