

Adopted Sons of God

Romans 8:14-17

November 1st, 2009



When I was in Mrs. Lassiter's sixth grade class at Faxon Elementary school, one of my friends discovered that his parents had actually adopted him as an infant. He had never questioned that he wasn't their natural son, and he really struggled with it. Mrs. Lassiter, being the kind of teacher she was, decided to help him with it. I'll never forget the day that we came to school and all of the chairs had been pushed out to the surrounding walls. She took my friend, Mark, in her arms and brought him to the center of the room. She and Mark sat down and gathered the rest of us around him. She began to talk to us about Mark being adopted. She said that of all of the children his parents could have loved and chosen, they had chosen Mark. She began to talk about how his life was going to be different from what it would have been because of his parent's choice and love for him. I can remember choking back tears as Mrs. Lassiter explained to us what adoption was, and the privilege of being adopted into a new family. As a matter of fact, when it was over, I was sad; I was disappointed. But it wasn't for Mark, it was for me. I thought how lucky Mark was to know that he had been specially loved and specially chosen to be adopted into the Outland family. And now he had all of the rights and privileges of their family. And it was not because they had to love him, but because they chose to love him. I thought about how unique and special he was, and how ordinary I was. I was loved, but for a split second, I thought how neat

it would be to trade my natural parents for adopted parents! We all know someone like that; special because of the love of their parents.

Those are the thoughts we are going to have when we open to Romans chapter 8. We are going to look verse 15 in the context of verses 14-17, because Paul is teaching something very important. I am convinced many of us miss the gist of Romans 8. We get so excited about the first part of Romans, and then the end of Romans where there is no condemnation and no separation, that we forget who Paul is talking about. He is talking about the people who will never be separated from God. He is talking about the people who will never be condemned to live a life in slavery to sin again. The heart of his teaching is this section of Romans 8:14-17.

Scripture

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

There are four statements of truth that we have to nail down for those who have no condemnation in their life and will never be separated from God.

1. Sons of God are led by the Spirit of God.

They are led by the Spirit to put to death the misdeeds of their body. A true adult son of God will continually have the Spirit leading him to 'take the shot' at sin that is in his unredeemed body. We did not receive a spirit of slavery at our conversion, therefore, to fall back into fear and live a fearful life as a Christian. We have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry out "*Abba Father.*" The adult son is continually, because of the Spirit within him, crying out to God in a father-son relationship.

- 2. The Spirit of God bears witness with our spirit that we are sons of God, if we are children, then we are heirs.**
- 3. If we are heirs of God, we are fellow heirs with Christ.**
- 4. Since we are fellow heirs with Christ, we will suffer just like He suffered.**

The path of sanctification that God has ordained in the life of His children is a life of suffering. Paul said the Spirit that we received is not a spirit of slavery. So, a son of God does not fall back into fear and live a life of condemnation under sin. The Spirit we received is a Spirit of adoption as sons.

- **Adoption as Sons**

We are going to focus on this phrase *"of adoption as sons."* It takes four English words to translate this one Greek word. That should tell us something. We also need to know that this phrase is only used five times in the entire Bible. All five of those are in the New Testament, and all five are used by Paul. Something special is going on here. This is the first time we will see this phrase, and it is a compound word. Usually, when you form a new word based on other words, there is a reason you use those words. Paul will use this word again in Romans 8:23: *"And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."* It will appear again in Romans 9:4: *"They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises."* The translators leave off *"as sons"* in this verse. Then, it shows up in Galatians 4:5: *"...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."* The last one is in Ephesians 1:5 *"...he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will..."*

I know your curiosity is peaked. You are wondering what those two words are that form the compound word. The first word means 'adult sons.' The second word means 'to place or to set, to put in the position of, or to

install.' So this word that is translated "*adoption as sons*" is a word that literally means 'to set someone in their proper place as an adult son.' It is only used by Paul. It was used three times when Paul talked to the church at Rome. Paul was a Roman citizen, and this word was used in Roman culture.

There are two ways this word is used. When you see how it was used in Roman culture, you will begin to understand what it means to be adopted as sons of God. When adoption took place in the Roman culture, it was usually not like an adoption that we are familiar with. When we think of adoption, we usually think about a person giving another person an opportunity to get out of the circumstances they are in. They are brought into another family where they will have better rights and privileges. An adoption is all about the person being adopted. We need many Christian people doing that in this day and age. But in Roman society, the primary people who were adopting sons were the high society people. They were the senators, the politicians, the magistrates, and the business people. Normally, they adopted so they would have an heir. They wanted someone to leave their estate to; someone who would follow in their line of work and character to make sure the father's name was perpetuated. A father would find himself in a situation where he didn't have an heir, or he didn't feel his natural son could carry on the line of the father.

Romans lived under what was called the ***patria potestas***, absolute control of the father. When a father wanted to adopt another man's son, they would have a public ceremony. There were two parts to it. The first part was called the ***mancipatio***. A father would give his son to be adopted because another father had set his affection upon him. He would bring him into a public square and they would have a symbolic sale. There would be copper and scales involved. There was an auctioneer who would bid off the son. There were seven witnesses involved. The first two times, the natural father would buy his son back. But the third time the son was auctioned the natural father would not bid. That third time publicly said that the

power of the *patria potestas* was broken in this boy's life. He was no longer under the control of his natural father.

The second part was called the ***vindicatio***. The adoptive father would go down to the magistrate and give just reason and cause as to why he wanted to adopt this boy into his family. After all the legal arrangements had been met, the magistrate would seal the document. The boy would now come under a new father. There were four things that took place:

- A. When the seal was put on the document, that boy lost all rights and privileges to his old family.**
- B. His natural father was no longer his father.**
- C. He now received the rights and privileges of the new family he had been adopted into.**
- D. He became an heir of the inheritance of the new family.**

Many times he was the only heir. But many times, after a Roman father had adopted an heir, he would have other children. The law said that if he had natural children, his relationship with the adopted child could never be broken. He would always be a fellow heir with the other siblings. Any debt or obligation that this boy had, up until the time he was adopted, was now canceled. No one had any tie to him for anything he had done in his past. He had a new father and a new family. While there were families who adopted for other reasons, the primary reason for adoption in the Roman culture was so that you could have an heir, and the name of the family could be continued. Many times, a father would give birth to natural children and know that none of them had the ability to carry on the name or the business, so he would adopt.

Many times, because the person being adopted was chosen, he carried on and had some of the very traits and similarities of the new father, even more so than his natural children. Have you ever seen a child that so closely resembled his father that he was almost just like him? On the eastside, we have a terminology for that. Sometimes we say, "He is the very spitting image of his daddy!" I discovered that we have been saying it

wrong! Over time, it has been mispronounced, and it stuck. Sometimes, people talk faster than we can hear. It really started out to be, "He is in the very spirit and image of his dad." The originator meant to say that there is a child, an heir, who is the very spirit and image of his father. That is what was behind Roman adoption.

But our problem is that there is another image behind this word. It is the image of publicly setting a person in their place in the family, in society, as an adult son. In that image, our English word "*adoption*" totally misses it. Let's pursue this second thought. Paul may also have known that in Roman culture, because of the *patria potestas*, only a father could grant when a son, who was a boy, became an adult son. Normally, a father set the time when his boy would become an adult son to be between the ages of 14 and 17.

Dads, we need to be careful, because some of us are not passing on our manhood to our boys. The neutering of the boys that is taking place in American culture is alarming to me. I am so thrilled with the generations coming behind me. I believe in the generation behind me and the generation behind them. I have a son who has friends who are getting together to devise test of manhood for their boys. I love it, but it is scaring the females in our family to death! But there has to be a time when we tell them, "You aren't a boy anymore, you are a man. Because you are a man, here is what we expect out of you."

Every culture, until ours, has had a passing from boyishness to manliness. You didn't grow into manhood, you became a man. Paul had a culture that believed that. When dad set the date, a large party or festival was planned. Normally, when they invited the friends and the family members, there were so many they couldn't have it at home so they rented a public building to hold this event. From sunrise until the ceremony, the boy spent his time with other men. When the ceremony started, the young boy would come to center stage. He would be surrounded by these men who had been with him all morning. When he came into the arena, he had on what

was called a ***toga praetexta***. It was a robe with a narrow purple band at the bottom. It signified that he was still a boy under his father. He did not make decisions, he depended on his daddy. He would now be challenged publicly by the men he had been with all morning. As he met those challenges, they would offer sacrifice to the gods of their family. Then, if he was found worthy of manhood, he would strip off his *toga praetexta* and they would put a ***toga virilis*** on him. This is the toga of manhood; it was solid white. Then, he would gather all of his toys, all the things in his life that signified boyhood, and take them to the temple of Apollo and offer them to him. Do you remember what Paul said in Corinthians? He said that when he was a child he thought like a child, acted like a child, and played like a kid. But when he became a man, he put away childish things.

I read documents from archaeology that testify of some of the things a few of the boys said in that culture. One boy named Marcello said, "When I took off the toga of boyhood and put on the toga of manhood, it was as if I had never been alive until that moment." In that public ceremony, that boy quit acting like boy and started acting like a man. He was given full rights and privileges as an adult son in the family. Now, he came alongside his father as he bought and sold and carried out the family business.

In no way do I want to minimize adoption, but I think when we read Paul's usages of this word, the idea is not the first meaning, it is the second. In Galatians chapter 4, it will be obvious that before faith in Christ came, God put people under law. Then, Paul said that when Christ came, you would not need a guardian or a school master any longer. When Christ came and you became a child of God by faith, you became an adult son. Galatians 4 is a follow through from chapter 3 where Paul said that we are heirs of Abraham. But then Paul remembers that if you are a child heir, but haven't gone through the ceremony of becoming an adult son, you don't feel any different than the slaves in the household. The father put people over you and someone was always telling you what to do. Even though you were the heir to your father's estate, you were treated just like a slave! You are

still a kid. You aren't big enough to make decisions for yourself. Dad couldn't trust you. But Paul said that at the appointed time, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the curse of the law, so that we could receive adoption as sons!

- **Abba Father**

But we are born on this side of the cross. And because we are on this side, God has determined that at the moment of salvation, He will treat all of his children as adult sons and daughters! He has put Himself, His Spirit, within them. The Spirit of God that is within each believer lives out the Christian life. So as he follows the leadership of the Holy Spirit, he will put down sin in his life! He will not be afraid, he will not be intimidated, and he will not back off. Because within him, the Holy Spirit of God is crying out, "Abba Father!" The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. The word "*children*" here is not the same word that is used in verses 14-15. Everyone who has been born of the Spirit of God has the Spirit within us giving us an objective witness that we are God's children as we follow the leadership of the Spirit and put down sin in our unredeemed bodies. How is that possible? He leads within us to cry out to God. But not to God, it is to our Father. We use the term "*Abba*." This is important. Paul uses an Aramaic and a Greek word. "*Abba*" is Aramaic, and "*Father*" is Greek. The word "*Abba*" is the word that a young Aramaic child would first say when addressing his dad. *Imi* is momma, and "*Abba*" is daddy.

I have noticed that in the Cunningham family, our boys and girls can say da-da before they can say ma-ma. Later, da da becomes daddy. They just struggle with m's. Now, watch this, this is really good. In the Old Testament, on several occasions Israel is presented as a son of God, His firstborn son. Many times, God will tell them that He has been a father to them. But if you read the Old Testament, Israel never addressed Him as Father. As a matter of fact, they didn't even speak His personal name. They were afraid to say it because they were so afraid of Him. When God

revealed Himself at Sinai in the lightning and thunder, and the earthquakes, they were afraid He would kill them if they said His name. So they called Him *Adonai*. They took the vowel sound of His personal name *Yahweh*, and pronounced it *Adonai*. When Jesus came along, He taught us as Christians to pray, "Our Father, who art in Heaven." A Jew would have never done that because the word in the biblical world for "Abba", and the Greek word for "Father" was not a word of infancy, it was a word of intimacy.

I love it when my son calls and says, "Dad." I love that. I love it when my grandson says, "Papaw." I don't mean to offend anyone on what I am going to say next. I can only speak within my culture, but I want to be respectful of your culture and upbringing. My mom was one of eight, so I had lots of cousins. So when I was a grandkid at Granddaddy and Granny Bogard's, we had a set of siblings who didn't refer to them that way. They called them Grandfather and Grandmother. Now, you have to remember that I was at their house a lot. So, I don't mean anything disrespectful, but when my cousins from the city would come to the country and I heard them call him Grandfather, it bothered me. My Granddaddy wasn't a grandfather, he was a granddaddy! Grandfather was too formal for the man in my life. I knew him, I was intimate with him, and we listened to St. Louis Cardinal Baseball games with him way into the night! I helped him in the garden. He was a daddy, who was grand to me, so he was my granddaddy! Sometimes when I would hear Grandfather, I would think it sounded like they didn't know him like I did.

Do you get the point? It is not about me and my cousins. It is about realizing that because you have the Holy Spirit within you, God, who owns cattle on a thousand hills, who took nothing and made everything, is my Daddy!! Until we see Him as Daddy, we will stay away from Him. We will worship Him from a distance. We will not walk with Him because we will have a spirit of fear. But when you've received the Holy Spirit of God, that wall is broken down, and you don't have to make an appointment with your Daddy. When you miss your morning talk with your Daddy, you don't

have to call and apologize, because Dad understands. Dad knows you like you know Dad! Do you see what Paul is trying to say? A son of God is an adult son. Because of our intimacy with our Father, He has brought us into the family business. He has put shoes on our feet. He has put a robe on our back. He has put a signet ring on our hand. He trusts you to make decisions in your part of the Kingdom. How dare you not trust yourself? How dare we live in fear? Your fear isn't coming from God. We have received a spirit of adoption; the Spirit of God who brings an awareness of who we are in Christ. We are an adult son. God has brought us into the family to carry out the business of the Kingdom. According to Romans 8:29, the ultimate goal of God is to make us into the 'spitting image' of Jesus Christ!