

Adoption into the Family of God.

We don't need just information, but transformation! A transformation that comes from a living word of God.

There are some wonderful doctrines which, when properly understood and mixed with faith, (not just head knowledge), will change our whole outlook on life, our priorities, sense of worth/identity and what we truly value. Adoption is one such doctrine.

The doctrine of regeneration explains that God gives us new spiritual life within. It's an ongoing process as His Spirit transforms us from the inside out.

It has been said "**Thirsty hearts are those whose longings have been awakened by the touch of God within them**" (A W Tozer)

It has also been said that "**if Christianity doesn't take your breath away, something else will.**"

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, they will be filled."

In Justification, God gives us right legal standing before Him. **The court room of heaven declares us 'not guilty' through Christ.**

Through adoption God makes us members of His family and it's this I want to speak about today.

The biblical teaching on adoption focusses on the personal relationships that salvation gives us with God and with His people. It explains a legal undertaking whereby God makes us members of His own family.

God's plan of adoption proves to us, **He is not someone who is only interested in getting me to live right, but someone who longs for the closest and most intimate of relationship with His children.** In this kind of relationship, Repentance becomes something I do freely, in the knowledge of His heart for relationship.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"

We cannot function effectively or rise to our highest potential unless we are in a loving relationship with God and seek to reflect that love to others. In fact the measure of our relationship with others, is the measure of our relationship with God.

How many of you can quote John 3:16?

How many of you can quote 1 John 3:16?

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Adoption invites us to consider our new relationship with God as Father and His family, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

When speaking about adoption, I can speak both from the biblical perspective, from the experience of being adopted into the family of God and as a father who knows what it is to adopt children.

When Gill and I married we, like so many couples assumed we would get jobs, buy a house and raise children. We didn't expect to suffer many painful years of childlessness. But we did. We eventually had a child after 8/9 years of trying. After we had our daughter, we continued our struggle for more children. This struggle became a gateway for us to adopted two beautiful girls.

Life's difficulties may seem strange or unfair, but whatever our struggles in life, it's often here we truly find God. A God cry can rise up, longing for the sovereign will of God to be done. It's in the testing of our faith that the true nature of the prayer "**thy will be done**" is revealed.

He can only establish His throne in our hearts when we invite Him in and in my experience this is often in the midst of trials rather than comfortable circumstances.

We cannot run someone else's race, can we? It's no good looking at someone else's life and saying "**It's alright for them, they have it easy.**" The truth is we don't really know what's going on or what mountains, or rugged paths any of us might face on our journey through life.

What matters is, our relationship with God along the way. **Hebrews 12 "looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith"** We can know a deep sense of wellbeing even when things don't go our way.

Rom 8:38 Paul explains to the believers that **nothing can separate us from God's love!**

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to

separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I can honestly say that given a choice today, I would not change a single thing concerning my family! God's plan for my family is perfect and I can say with complete honesty that my love for both our birth child and our adopted children is no different. I love them equally. I love their unique personalities and cannot imagine life without them.

I believe this reflects something of the heart and nature of God for us.

In John's gospel, right at the start **John 1:12** he says: -

**"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:
Who were born, not of blood, nor the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."**

When we receive Christ as our Lord and saviour we are no-longer '**of**' the world but born of God (ek tou – out of). Our origin is 'of' the world until we are born of God, then our origin is '**of**' God.

It follows that those who don't believe in Christ, are not children of God or adopted into His family, but they are "children of wrath"

Let's turn to **Ephesians 1:3–14**

This scripture will make a whole lot of sense in a moment when we look at the process of adoption in ancient Rome.

But let's first just consider some of the wonderful statements Paul makes here:

- The Father has blessed us with every spiritual blessing
- He has chosen us
- Made us accepted in the beloved (grafted in, with the natural branches)
- Redeemed us from an oppressive master
- Adopted us
- Forgave our sins/debts
- Given us an inheritance that will not spoil or fade.

Contrast this with where he has rescued us from:

Eph 2:1-3

- Were dead
- Had a worldly walk according to the dictates of the devil.
- Satan's spirit was at work in us
- We were sons of disobedience
- Conducting ourselves in lusts of the flesh
- By nature children of wrath

Granted, we still struggle with the old nature. But the old is fading and the new becoming ever brighter as **we allow** the regenerating work of His Spirit in our hearts. Now, this is important, we need to respond positively to the Holy Spirit and say "yes" to Him, it takes an act of the will to follow through with our actions.

You don't adopt your own natural born child child. Bethany is our child by birth and we have a birth certificate to prove it. You only adopt a child who is born into another family, the offspring of another parent.

If the state authorities would step in to rescue children from harm, how much more do you think God might want to step in to deliver us from an oppressive parent?

We were born into sin, with a sinful nature and our natural father was the devil. He had a rightful claim on my life as a child born of the flesh into sin, but he is an unfit parent who leads all his own children to destruction. He is the father of lies and would have us believe his ways are best, that he holds the keys to true satisfaction and he will show you how to live life to the full. He blinds the eyes of unbelievers and keeps people captive in their shame, guilt and fear. He is an oppressive, abusive father who has devices that are devastatingly effective at separating people from our Heavenly Father. His way is one of slavery and captivity but God's way is life, hope and a future.

Paul in his letters uses adoption as a metaphor that beautifully describes our identity and place in the family of God.

We have a Heavenly Father and **His perfect plan** for our lives is adoption. Adoption is not second best or a last resort but His very best for us.

God would have us joined together in the closest of relationship with Himself and others. So close in fact that the scriptures talk about us being joined together like body parts that each has a unique and vital function, a vine that benefits from the nourishing sap as we abide in Him, a temple built with living stones and here a family.

Family members have a special bond and connection and when functioning well create a real sense of identity and belonging. The family of God is extra special and gives the kind of relationship that you cannot get anywhere else. The family of God is the only relationship that will last forever! Get used to me folks, you're gonna see me for a long, long time!

"Church is not an event we attend but it's a family we belong to."

If you are feeling a bit isolated or disconnected from the body here, or if you are new and want to connect with others. Speak to me and other's in the leadership. It's not right that you feel that way.

Now the number one priority as a member of the church is "to love God, yes but also to love the other members!"

Col' 3:14 "But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

In ancient Rome Adoption was rarely used as an act of benevolence. It would be used where a family was childless or if the natural child was estranged and they wanted a son to continue the family line. It was often slaves who were adopted.

The word the apostle Paul uses for Adoption is a Greek word "hyiothesia"

Hyios = Son

Thesis = Place or constituent

So the word adoption speaks of sonship (your identity) and belonging (to a new family, with a new home and new destiny/inheritance).

It's interesting what God said to Moses when He gave him the 10 commandments.

He said "**I am the Lord your God** who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of **the house of slavery**." His plan was a new identity for His people and a new home! He adopted the people of Israel, entering into a covenant of adoption.

In Roman law the law of “adoptioni” was a very serious undertaking.

- The adopted son becomes a member of the new family, just as though he had been born of the adopter's own blood. The adopted person's old relationships and responsibilities were totally severed and they would enter the new family debt free.
- He or she was invested with all of the privileges of a full family member.

Can you imagine for a moment what would have been going through the believers minds as Paul explained they have been adopted by Almighty God! They would have known what Roman adoption meant and the implications for the adopted person and they must have been filled with a great sense of the privilege of being called a son or daughter of God. That God would choose them and give the full rights and honour befitting His own Son!

The Father in the Roman culture had absolute control over his family. He held the legal right of ‘patria potestas’ which allowed him to grant or withhold whatever he chose from his family.

Of course a good father would want the best for his children, however, if he chose to, he could inflict any punishment he saw fit. He could sell the child into bondage or even inflict the death penalty. If however the father should decide to sell a child into bondage, there was a limit that he could do this no more than 3 times and should he do so a third time, he would then forfeit the rights of ‘patria potestas’ and would therefore lose the right to inflict such punishment on the child ever again.

Adoption was a legal process and as part of the process the father would go through a procedure of selling and redeeming the child 3 times, which meant the adopted child could not be deprived of liberty again. He was protected by law from being sold into bondage.

This therefore put an adopted child in a more secure and certain position even than a birth child would have had. How amazing is that? We have the assurance God will never leave nor forsake us.

The effect of Roman adoption was fourfold: -

- A change of family.

- A change of name. The adopted person was given a new name. He assumed the name of his adopter and no-longer known by the name of the birth family.
- A change of home
- New responsibilities and new privileges

The adopted person suffered many losses, but they were inevitably more than compensated by the gains! They would even have the legal right to inherit all that belonged to the father.

We have been adopted into God's family! How amazing is that?

Gal 3:26- 29

Paul makes it clear the adoption is not only for the Jew but for all who would receive Christ.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."

In Gal 4: 1-7

Paul explains that

- We were all children under bondage or slavery to sin. The law of God acted as a witness to our sin to the rightful ownership Satan had over our lives.
- **The law of adoption broke these old ties and placed us on a new legal footing. The debt of sin is cancelled just as under Roman law, all the debts and obligations the adopted child, were paid off. We therefore are no longer indebted to the world or slaves to sin and Satan but we are free to live as heirs.**
- **We also receive a seal of adoption. This seal in our hearts is God's stamp of approval and evidence of the legally binding nature of the transaction.**

Whilst I was in Israel, I was shown the clay seals that were used to seal important documents. Each seal had the name of the person to whom the seal belonged. It is marvellous to think that God the Holy Spirit should set His seal against the legal dead of my adoption into the family of God. A seal of adoption witnessed and approved by the heavenly authorities and hidden in my heart for all eternity. God's seal of approval is upon each one of our lives, who have given ourselves over for adoption.

The ceremony that bound a son to slavery and the ceremony that transferred a slave to sonship were very similar.

One would say:

“I claim this man as my slave”

The other would say:

“I claim this man as my son.”

The law required that the ceremony is witnessed. Who is it that bears witness to our adoption?

Rom 8:15-17 “The Spirit bears witness.....”

Not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption cry Abba Father.

A joint witness of the Holy Spirit bearing witness with our spirit to this same blessed fact.

At the point of adoption a will was required by law. It was witnessed and sealed. It gave the right for the adopted son to the full inheritance of the Father at the appointed time.

Ephesians 1:13-14

“...after you believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise.....purchased possession....”

There is another wonderful truth about adoption.

When Gill and I adopted children there was already an older sibling who was going through the legal process. There were complications and this made a way for our children, the younger children, to be adopted before the elder. There are parallels here with God's plan for Israel.

Romans 9:1-4

God is clearly referring to Israel and their adoption. Israel's rejection Rom11:11 has opened the door for our adoption but a day is coming when all Israel will be saved. Romans 11:12 and Romans 11:25-26 – first the fullness of the gentiles and then all Israel will be saved.

We are privileged to be a part of the great plan of God. That we should be called Children of God with a new identity, a new name, a new family, a new destiny and a new inheritance.

The question, I must leave with you is this:

How then must I live?

Allow the Holy Spirit to renew your thinking, as children of an eternal God, members of His family and heirs of an eternal kingdom.

Consider what this might mean in relation to your way of life, your priorities, attitudes to possessions, your husband or wife, attitudes to money, to others, to the church family, your day to day behaviour, your language and conversations, prayer life, service in the kingdom, your gifting and calling etc. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit in order that you may live a holy, fruitful and pleasing life on your journey to your eternal inheritance.

Amen