**God’s Adoption Of Us (SR: Ezekiel 16:1-14)**

What God has done for mankind is beyond words. Nevertheless, in His infinite wisdom, God has accommodated human language to convey His will to His creation in the Scriptures. In the Bible we find words like forgiveness, atonement, propitiation, election; these words no doubt are powerful and substantive enough to give us a glimmer of God’s love for us. He loved the world so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for us.

While words like these tend to be the focus of theologians and Bible students, there is one term that conveys God’s love in an esp. emotive & unique way – adoption. The term is used several times in the NT, always in the Pauline corpus, to show us unequivocally that God is gracious, loving, & tenderhearted to those made in His image. This is all expressed freely, openly in the light of our helpless, desperate situation brought on by sin (Ro. 5:6-8).

**I. Understanding The Background Of Adoption (Greek: ujioqesiva)**

A. Roman Background (ANE conceptions seem equivalent)

1. *“...in the Roman world of the first century AD an adopted son was a son deliberately chosen by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate; he was no whit inferior in status to a son born in the ordinary course of nature, and might well enjoy the father’s affection more fully and reproduce the father’s character more worthily.”* (F.F. Bruce, “Romans,” *TNTC*, 157)

2. *“Adoption was a powerful figure to the ancient Mediterranean people and it is to us...The son, in turn, totally surrendered himself to the new father in order to receive his name and inheritance. The father gave great gifts to the son. The son responded with respect for the father. Love was given and love was returned. The relationship could be wonderfully fulfilling to both, particularly if the adopted son were poor and in need prior to the adoption. This analogy from Roman sociology fits well the picture of the sinner adopted into the family of God.”* (Caldwell, “Ephesians,” 22)

3. Concepts That Help Us Understand The Process:

a. *Patria Potestas* – The father possessed autocratic authority over the son for his entire life (the daughter until she was married). Even when the son became an adult, this did not change. This included the right to imprison, scourge, or even kill his son.

b. *Mancipatio –* Symbolic sale of the child involving copper & scales. The father symbolically sold and bought back the child 2x and then sold them a 3rd time, but did not purchase them back.

c. *Vindicatio –* The person seeking to adopt would approach a Roman magistrate with a case for their *adoptio*. If approved, the child would officially be theirs for all time. Bio parent had no claims.

d. When adoption of a child took place, it was the transference of total authority over that child. For this reason, it was a very serious exchange of power that required seven witnesses.

4. Examples: Augustus/Tiberius; Claudius/Nero (sister/wife Octavia)

B. Jewish Background

1. Jewish conception was not as clear as Roman conception. Yet, various mandates in the Law of Moses seem to have a comparable function.

2. Bible Examples: Jacob/Ephraim, Manasseh (Gen. 48:5); Moses (Ex. 2:10); Esther (2:7, 15 NIV); Jesus (by Joseph); Israel (Rom. 9:4)

C. Why This Was Accommodated For The Bible:

1. *“Men and women were created for life in fellowship with God, as children with the Father (Gn. 1:26; Acts 17:28). By sin that privilege was forfeited, but by grace, in and through Christ, restoration to sonship is made possible (John 1:12). Adoption is the best way to describe this (cf. Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5), because adopted children have their position by grace and not by right, and yet are brought into the family on the same footing as children by birth.”* (Foulkes, “Ephesians,” *TNTC*, 1999, 56f).

2. *“’The adoptee is taken out of his previous state and is placed in a new relationship with his new paterfamilias. All his old debts are canceled, and in effect he starts a new life...The idea of having a new state in a new family and in effect starting a new life finds obvious parallels within the writings of the New Testament...God is willing to adopt us as his sons, if we are willing to be adopted by him.”* (Jason Longstreth, “Our Adoption As Sons” in *Blessed Be God: Studies in Ephesians*, 63-65).

**II. Usage Toward Christians In The NT**

*A. Ephesians 1:3-14, esp. vv. 5-6 – God’s Plan To Adopt*

1. Context: God is to be blessed because of His incredible scheme of redemption, set in place before the creation of the world, accomplished through the death, burial, & resurrection of Jesus.

2. *“God intentionally purposed to adopt us as sons. He longingly desired to do so as a man or woman might want more than anything else in the world to be able to adopt a child. God wants us! Further, the adopted child needs to know that he is wanted by his parents. In spiritual adoption the will (thelēmatos) of God has never been at issue. He has freely exposed his innermost emotions which shout his desires for children upon whom he can bestow his love. Our willingness to receive the adoption and accept him as our Father is the issue!* (Caldwell, “Ephesians,” 24)

3. *“The grace of God in redeeming sinful children of Adam and adopting them as His own sons will be throughout eternity the most glorious theme of praise to His name...Be it noted again that all the blessings which are ours by God’s grace are ours in Christ; there is no way apart from Him in which God either decrees or effects the bestowal of His grace on men.”* (F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 1974, 30)

4. *“When the Father chose a people for himself, deciding to adopt them as his own children, he was motivated by love alone. Hence, what he did was a result not of sheer determination but of supreme delight.”* (William Hendriksen, “Exposition of Ephesians,”1970, 79)

*B. Romans 8:15 – The Christian As An Adopted Child Of God*

1. Context: People were condemned in sin by the law of God as they walked according to the flesh; yet, through Jesus Christ they are delivered from condemnation as they walk in the Spirit (Rom. 7:24-13).

2. The Holy Spirit testifies with our spirits that as many as have received Jesus and walk in Him are children of God. These two witnesses would be analogous to the Roman requirement of witnesses at an adoption.

3. Adopted by God, we confidently approach Him w/ the most intimate of relationships, signified by “Abba” (cf. Mk. 14:36; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

4. *“It was Paul’s picture that when a man became a Christian he entered into the very family of God. He did nothing to deserve it; God, the great Father, in his amazing love and mercy, has taken the lost, helpless, poverty-stricken, debt-laden sinner and adopted him into his own family, so that the debts are cancelled and the glory inherited.”* (William Barclay, “Ephesians,” *DSB*, 1975, 107).

*C. Galatians 4:4-7 – The Christian As An Adopted Child Of God*

1. Context: People were condemned in sin by the law of God, particularly under the Law of Moses, as they walked according to the flesh. Through the education of the Law and fulfillment and satisfaction of it by the atonement of Jesus, people have come of age and been adopted as sons, no longer serving in inferiority, but living as heirs of God.

2. *“The main idea of adoption seems to be this: we were children of the Devil (John 8:44), in slavery to sin and doomed to eternal damnation. In the abundance of his marvelous grace, God adopted us as his children. The blessedness of the relationship as a child of God is seen in contrast with the relationship of a servant (v. 7).”* (Mike Willis, “The Book of Galatians,” *Truth Commentaries,* 1994, 185f)

3. *“Under the Jewish law they had felt that they were slaves or servants. Now through faith they can feel that they are sons—children. A son obeys from love, a servant from fear. Now they are no longer servants, but sons, and the son is the heir of the heritage of the father.”* (Lipscomb, “Second Corinthians and Galatians,” vol. 3, 1969, 243)

4. *“The idea is, that as the Lord Jesus was enabled to approach God with the language of endearment and love, so they would be. He, being the true and exalted Son of God, had the spirit appropriate to such a relation; they being adopted, and made like him, have the same spirit...it was not permitted slaves to use the title of Abba in addressing the master of the family to which they belonged. If so, then the language which Christians are here represented as using is the language of freemen, and denotes that they are not under the servitude of sin.”* (Albert Barnes, “2 Corinthians and Galatians,” *Notes on the New Testament*, 1955,361f)

*D. Romans 8:23 – The Christian’s Resurrection As Adoption*

1. Context: As a result of sin, our flesh and the entirety of the world became subjected to futility. At Jesus’ return, this will dramatically change.

2. *“Christians are sons of God by adoption, but this has not been publicly manifested, or we have not yet been revealed as the sons of God by the manifestation with Christ at his coming. Evidently,* huiothesia *refers to this public manifestation when our bodies will be fashioned after his glorious body (Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 3:4).”* (Hamilton, “Romans,” 505)

3. *“The fullness of the adoption, their complete admission to the privileges of the sons of God, shall be in the day of judgment, in the presence of the universe, and amidst the glories of the final consummation of all things...he looks forward to that complete deliverance, and to that elevated state, when, in the presence of an assembled universe, he shall be acknowledged as a child of God.”* (Barnes, “Romans,” 1956, 193f)

**III. What We Gain By God’s Choice To Adopt Us**

A. A new nature, which is derived from God (Jn. 1:12f; James 1:18; 2Pet. 1:3; 1Jn. 5:18). This is in contrast to being children of wrath (Eph. 2:3).

B. A new image, the bearing of God’s likeness (Rom. 8:29; 2Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; 2Pet. 1:4). This is in contrast to our former fallen identity as children of Adam (Rom. 5) and of Satan (cf. Jn. 8:44). *“We were absolutely in the power of sin and of the world; God, through Jesus, took us out of that power into his; and that adoption wipes out the past and makes us new.”* (Barclay, *Ephesians*, 80)

C. A new spirit. The spirit of Jesus, which frees us from guilt, bondage, and fear of death (Rom. 8:15, 21; 2Cor. 3:17; Gl. 5:1; Heb. 2:15; 1Jn. 5:14). A spirit with a holy boldness and royal dignity (Heb. 10:19, 22; 1Pet. 2:9; 4:14)

D. A new name (1Jn. 3:1f; Rev. 2:17; 3:12) and a new family (Rom. 8:15f). *“Whether Jew or Gentile by nationality, every Christian believer has the position of an adopted adult son in God’s family.”* (Gareth Reese, *Galatians*, 2011, 175)

E. A new assurance of being loved (Jn. 17:23; Ro. 5:5-8; Ti. 3:4; 1Jn. 4:7-11). This results in protection, consolation, & provision (Ps. 125:2; Is. 46:13; Lk. 12:27- 32; Jn. 14:18; 1Co. 3:21-23; 2Co. 1:4). Discipline (Ps. 51:11f; Heb. 12:5-11).

F. A new hope – eternal inheritance (Ro. 8:17, 23; Jms. 2:5; 1Pe. 1:3f; 3:7; Phil. 3:21)

**IV. Our Role In The Adoption Process**

A. *“God foreordained that all those who voluntarily choose to walk by faith in Christ shall be added to his family by adoption. God willed in his love that those in Christ should be his sons with the full benefit of inheritance...This adoption, which begins when we receive God’s invitation by being baptized into Christ, is meaningful only as we are led by the Spirit through God’s word.”* (C.G. Caldwell, “The Book of Ephesians,” *Truth Commentaries*, 21, 23)

B. *“Baptism is the act of adoption by which we pass out of one family, and are brought into the new one with God as our Father, and Jesus Christ as our elder brother, and by which we acquire the right to the blessings and favors of the family of God. After we have been legally adopted into the family of God, we must drink more and more into the spirit of the family that we may not lose our fitness for its privileges and forfeit our rights to its inheritance.”* (Lipscomb, “Second Corinthians and Galatians,” 1969, 241)

C. We need to imitate our Father and Behave as His Children (Lev. 19; Matt. 5:48; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:10; 1Th. 2:11f; 1Jn. 3:10; 5; 2Pet. 1:4)

*“Imagine yourself an orphan child, cold and hungry, walking the streets in search of food and shelter. A dedicated Christian, loving and kind, takes notice of your plight. This Christian is wealthy and successful, but he and his wife have no children. He stops beside you and stoops to look you in the eye. As he smiles through tears of compassion, he says, ‘Please come home with me and let me adopt you into my family.’ That, of course, means that you will be cared for, loved, protected and nurtured in spiritual and physical things. It means that you will inherit his estate as if you had been naturally born to him. Will you turn and walk away? Can you imagine the lonely, hungry, fatherless child rejecting such an offer? So many turn away from God. He is offering much more than any man could offer. How foolish we are when we reject the Lord!”* (C.G. Caldwell, “The Book of Ephesians,” *Truth Commentaries*, 25f)