

Adopted by God Part #1

“Introduction to Adoption”

Selected Scriptures

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on January 13, 2019 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Most people were just curious. That’s why they asked us the question. Others asked because it did not make sense to them. Still others asked with a look on their face that said, ***“Are you crazy?”***
 - For two years my wife, Heather, and I were asked one question over and over again: ***“why are you planning to adopt? You already have three children – why would you want to add a fourth? Besides, isn’t it risky to adopt?”***
- We never entered marriage with a plan to adopt but everything changed during a camping trip one summer. I was out for a run and was listening to a sermon on how God adopts us into his family through Jesus Christ.
 - I already knew that God loved me but, if I was really honest, I was more aware of how much I fail him than I was of his love for me. Without even realizing it, I lived with an underlying insecurity about what God really thought of me.
 - As the preacher developed the Bible’s teaching on adoption, I was overcome by God’s personal and particular love in adopting me. I had to stop running. I just stood there in the middle of the campground with tears of joy streaming down my face, filled with a deep assurance of God’s love for me.
- I then became obsessed with learning more about the Bible’s teaching on God’s adoption of sinners through Jesus Christ. As my joy increased I also began to develop a heart for adopting a child.
 - I began talking with Heather about it and both our hearts were moved to begin the adoption process. On March 26, 2013, we adopted our son, Joshua, from Kunming, China. Here’s a picture of Josh the day after we adopted him. **(SHOW SLIDE 2)**
 - Why did we choose to adopt? When people ask this question, I answer something like this: ***“Well, we are Christians. We believe that, although we have sinned against God, he loved us so much that he sent Jesus to rescue us and adopt us as his children. God’s adopting love has so captured our hearts that we wanted to show this type of love to a child in need.”***
- This morning we are beginning an eight-part series on adoption. By adoption, I mean adoption into God’s family. There are parallels between God’s adoption of us and adopting children but the main point of this series is to look at what the Bible teaches about being adopted by God.
 - Being adopted by God is right at the core of Christianity. Listen to what J.I. Packer writes: **(SHOW SLIDE 3) *“If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. . . . Our understanding of Christianity cannot be better than our grasp of adoption.”***¹
- So the purpose of this series is to help you grasp what it means to be adopted by God and how this great truth transforms many practical areas of your life.
 - For instance, adoption grants deep assurance of God’s love for you. Adoption deals with issues of loneliness and belonging. Adoption shows us how to relate to God, how to fight sin, how we should function as a church, and how to find strength in the face of trials and suffering.
- Today is an introduction and overview of the whole subject. This message is about understanding some key concepts and ideas so that we can really apply them to our hearts and lives in the weeks to come.
 - Today I want to talk about four things: the *meaning* of adoption, the *inclusivity* of adoption, the *story* of adoption, and the *neglect* of adoption.

¹ J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 201–202.

THE MEANING OF ADOPTION

- So let's begin by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 4) the meaning of adoption.**
 - There is only one author in the Bible who uses the term "adoption" and that is the apostle Paul. He uses it five times. It is the Greek word "huiiothesia."
 - We can understand what this word means when we see that **(SHOW SLIDE 5) Huiiothesia is a combination of two Greek words: "huios," which means "son" and "tithēmi," which means, "to place." So "huiiothesia" means "to place as a son."**
- Think of it this way: There was a time when Joshua was not my son. So also, the Bible teaches that no one is automatically part of God's family. Apart from adoption, Rom 6:6 says we are "slaves of sin" (see also Rom 6:17, 20), Eph 2:2 says we are "sons of disobedience," and Eph 2:3 says we are "by nature children of wrath."
 - But in an act of tremendous grace, God takes slaves and, through Christ, makes them "sons" (Gal 4:6-7). He takes "children of wrath" and, and through Christ, makes them "children of God" (Rom 8:16).
- Be astonished by this! Stand in wonder at this! Just like Joshua was placed as a son in our family, God adopts those who believe in Jesus into his family. Just like Joshua's old life is completely gone, so also our old life in slavery is completely gone.
 - Moreover, when Joshua was adopted he was immediately given all the rights and privileges that come from being a son in our family. Likewise, when God adopts us, we are immediately given all the rights and privileges of a son or daughter within His family.
 - O what amazing grace! O what astonishing love!
- We often emphasize what Jesus saves us *from*: he saves us *from* sin, *from* judgement, *from* death, *from* condemnation, *from* the wrath of God, and *from* hell.
 - This is good news! But the good news does not stop there. The good news is not just that God has saves us *from* these awful things; it is also that he saves us *to* something: namely, *to* adoption in his family. God doesn't just set us free from slavery and then leave us to ourselves. No, he also adopts us and brings us home to the warmth and comfort of his family.
 - There are stories where a king frees a slave from slavery. That is a tremendous act of grace. But have you ever heard a story where a king freed a slave and then adopted into him into the royal family? Have you ever heard a story where the former slave is made into a prince and given a share in the inheritance of the king's vast fortune? That kind of thing only happens in fairy tales. Yet the good news of the Bible is that this fairy tale has come true in Jesus Christ.
- So what does the apostle Paul mean by adoption? **(SHOW SLIDE 6) Adoption is an act of God's grace whereby he places those he redeems from slavery into his family, granting them all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a son or daughter of God.**
 - I want to take this another step further. In order to really understand the meaning of adoption it is very helpful to contrast it with two other biblical images of salvation.
 - Think of salvation like one diamond with many facets. As we behold the beauty of our salvation we can see it from different angles. Let's contrast the angle of adoption with two other angles. The first is called justification and the second is called regeneration.

ADOPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 7) First, adoption is different from, but similar to, justification.**
 - Both are legal terms but refer to different types of legal proceedings.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 8) Justification is a legal term that pictures us in the criminal court.**
 - We are guilty criminals but through faith in Jesus, God the judge pardons us for breaking his law and credits us with Jesus' perfect life. This is glorious because, through Jesus, we are justified before the Judge and can shout, **"There is . . . no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"** (Rom 8:1).
- Adoption is also a legal term. **(SHOW SLIDE 9) However, adoption is a legal term that pictures us in the civil court.**
 - Having rescued us from slavery through Jesus, God the Father now legally adopts us into his family. We have a new legal status. We are no longer slaves but shout, **"I am daughter of God" or "I am a son of God."**

- So justification is a glorious truth because it emphasizes the fact that, through Jesus, we are legally right before God the judge. Adoption is also a glorious truth because it emphasizes the fact that that, through Jesus, now we are the sons and daughters of God the Father. Adoption is different from, but similar to, justification.

ADOPTION AND REGENERATION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 10) Second, adoption is different from, but similar to, regeneration.**
 - Regeneration refers to the fact that God grants spiritual life to spiritually dead people. In Jesus' words we are "born again" (Jn 3:3-8). The image here is of spiritual birth. The Holy Spirit enables us to be spiritually born into God's family and so share his spiritual nature. So regeneration is similar to adoption in that it speaks about believers as "children of God" who have God as their Father (1 Jn 3:1-2).
 - It is the apostle John who writes most about being born into God's family. But we must not confuse John's teaching on spiritual birth with Paul's teaching on adoption. Adoption is similar to, but different from, regeneration.
- You can see the difference in my family. I have two sons. Tyler is my son through birth. Joshua is my son through adoption. They are both my sons but they *became* my sons in different ways.
 - To say that Tyler is my biological son emphasizes the fact that I gave him life and he shares my nature.
 - So also, God grants us the new birth so that we share his spiritual life and nature.
 - Joshua is equally my son but adoption emphasizes something different. Adoption emphasizes the fact that Josh was taken out of his old life and granted new legal status as my son.
 - In the same way, Paul uses adoption to teach us that God rescued us from our old life of slavery and granted us new legal status as his children.
- So that is the meaning of adoption. Adoption is an act of God's grace whereby he places those he redeems from slavery into his family, granting them all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a son or daughter of God.
 - Adoption is different from, but similar to, justification. Adoption is also different from, but similar to, regeneration.

THE INCLUSIVITY OF ADOPTION

- Secondly, let's talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 11) the inclusivity of adoption.**
 - I was reading Galatians 4 with one of my daughters. Paul writes that God sent Jesus into the world **"so that you might receive adoption as sons."** Two verses later it says, **"So you are no longer a slave, but a son."**
 - She then said, **"What about daughters? Does God love boys more than girls?"** It is a good question because Paul only speaks of **"adoption as sons."** So is Paul sexist? Does the Bible exclude women and girls? No.
- In the Roman culture of Paul's day, the term "adoption" was not used like we use it today when we adopt an orphaned boy or girl. Adoption was done when a man did not have a son to be his heir. He would then adopt a teenage or adult male to be his heir.
 - The most famous example of this is when Julius Caesar adopted the 19-year-old Octavius to be his son and therefore the next Emperor of Rome.
 - Since it was only males who were legally adopted, it would have made no sense for Paul to speak of adopting daughters.
- Yet, far from being chauvinist, Paul is actually subverting the male dominated culture of his day and elevating the status of women. In Roman culture only males were adopted as sons and heirs and yet Paul declares in Galatians 3:26, **(SHOW SLIDE 12) "in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith"** and a few verses later says, **"So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."**
 - So through faith in Jesus, *all* males and females, get the status that *only* males got in Roman culture. Paul uses the term "sons" but in application it refers to both males and females.
 - Adoption is about inclusivity and equality within the family of God.

ADOPTION TELLS THE BIG STORY OF THE BIBLE

- In the third place now, I want to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 13) the story of adoption.**
 - I told you earlier that Paul speaks of adoption on five occasions. In every one of these instances Paul uses the idea of adoption to tell a part of the Bible's big story. Each reference to adoption focuses on a key period within the timeline of the larger story.
 - So what I want to do right now is quickly walk us through each of these five passages. We are going to look at these in detail in the weeks to come but for now I just want us to hear the big story of the Bible as told through the lens of adoption.
 - As we look at these passages, we see that Paul tells this big story in five chapters. I have drawn all this up in a chart that I will gradually reveal on the screen. The font size is a bit small so I have also printed a copy of the chart and put it in the worship folder for you (see also the last page of these sermon notes).
- **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Chapter 1 of the big story takes place *before creation*. In Ephesians 1:4-5 Paul writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 15) “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for [huiiothesian] adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.”**
 - So before God created the universe he made a plan for the universe he would create. The Father's plan was adopt people into his family through Jesus Christ.
 - So adoption is at the very centre of why God created the universe. That brings us to chapter 2.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** Chapter 2 of this great adoption story takes place in what we can call “the time of slavery.” When Adam and Eve sinned, the Bible says that the entire human race became enslaved to sin. But in this time of slavery God began to put his pre-creation plan into effect. He started by adopting Israel as his son. Romans 9:4 speaks about Israel and says, **(SHOW SLIDE 17) “to them belong the [huiiothesia] adoption.”**
 - Even though Israel was God's son, we will see in a few weeks that he did not get to enjoy the freedom that an adult son would. He was like a child who lived under the strict training of the law. So even though Israel was God's son, Israel lived in a slave-like state. Israel longed for the day for the freedom that comes with being an adult.
 - So before Jesus came, all of humanity was enslaved to sin. God showed his grace in adopting Israel but even Israel lived in a slave-like state under the law.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** This brings us to chapter 3 of the big story, which takes place in what we can call “the fullness of time.”
 - The Father's pre-creation plan reaches its most important point when the Father sends his own Son into the world. Galatians 4:4 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 19) “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.”** Now why did God send His Son? Galatians 4:5: **“to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive [huiiothesian] adoption as sons.”**
 - So the Father sent the Son in order to redeem us - that is, to free us from slavery. But there was an even higher purpose than freedom. The Father sent the Son to free us “so that” that the Father could adopt us as adult sons who enjoy freedom.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** This moves us into chapter 4 of the big story of adoption, which takes place in the time between Christ's first coming and his second coming. I will call this period “the time of adoption.”
 - During this period, all who receive Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, are adopted into God's family. We receive the full rights of a mature son. The Father also gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us out of our old fears by assuring us that we truly are the children of God.
 - Romans 8:15-16 says, **(SHOW SLIDE 21) “You have received the Spirit of [huiiothesias] adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”**
 - Even though we are adopted there is a sense in which our adoption is incomplete. We groan because, even though we are heirs, our Father does not immediately take us to our eternal home and give us our inheritance.

- Our Father calls us to live in this fallen world, to suffer for his sake, to fight against our sin, and to wait patiently for our future inheritance.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 22)** That brings us to the final chapter of the big adoption story, which takes place in the future new creation. A day is coming when Jesus will return. The Father will publicly reveal who his children are and will give them their inheritance – an inheritance that is so glorious it cannot even be compared to the sufferings of this present time. Part of that inheritance is a resurrection body that is immortal.
 - And so Paul writes in Romans 8:23: **(SHOW SLIDE 23) *we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for [huiiothesian] adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.***
- So you see adoption tells the big story of the Bible. Adoption is at the centre of why God created the universe. Adoption is at the core of Israel's identity. Adoption is at the heart of why Jesus came. Adoption defines who we are in the present. And, adoption is the great hope that we look forward to in the future.
 - That is the story of adoption and we are going to unpack these passages in detail over the next seven weeks.

THE NEGLECT OF ADOPTION

- Now, if adoption is at the very centre of why the universe exists, why Jesus came, and what it means to be a Christian, then you would think Christians would always be talking about it.
 - You would think authors would write books to explain it, pastors would preach about it, and musicians would compose songs to lift our hearts to celebrate it.
- Yet, as we transition now to the fourth and final point, I want to briefly talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 24) the neglect of adoption.**
 - We have seen how important adoption is to Paul. It is strange, therefore, to discover that adoption has been greatly neglected throughout the history of the Christian Church.
- One of the easiest ways to discover what Christians believe and value is to look at what we call the “creeds” and “confessions” of the church. Today we call them “statements of faith.” So a statement of faith, or a creed, is a written document that outlines in a precise manner what Christians believe and value.
 - For instance, the most famous is the Apostle's Creed, which begins by saying, ***“I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.”***
 - It goes on to speak about belief in the Holy Spirit, the Church, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the dead, and life everlasting. So what do the creeds of history reveal about adoption?
- The famous historian Phillip Schaff compiled all the creeds and confessions from the time of Christ to the year 1900. This compilation fills three volumes and is over 2500 pages long.
 - It is shocking to discover that, to our knowledge, no creed or confession gives a distinct statement about adoption until the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1647. Adoption is barely mentioned in the creeds and confessions of the church.
 - But what about today?
- For my doctoral studies I researched the statements of faith from the major evangelical denominations in Canada.
 - There are thirty-two evangelical denominations in Canada. My research revealed that **(SHOW SLIDE 25) 22 of 32 Canadian Evangelical Statements of Faith make *no* reference to adoption and most have *no* reference to believers as children of God.** This includes, but is not limited to, The Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches in Canada,² The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada,³

² “What We Believe,” The Fellowship, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.fellowship.ca/WhatWeBelieve>.

³ “What We Believe,” The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://paoc.org/family/what-we-believe>.

Evangelical Free Church of Canada,⁴ Baptist General Conference of Canada,⁵ Church of the Nazarene Canada,⁶ Vineyard Canada,⁷ Evangelical Mennonite Conference,⁸ Canadian Baptists of Western Canada,⁹ Calvary Chapel Association,¹⁰ Canadian Foursquare Church,¹¹ and the North American Baptists.¹²

- So what about those ten denominations that do mention adoption? Five of them only make one passing reference and provide no explanation as to what is meant. That leaves only five of the thirty-two denominations who speak of adoption and give some space to explaining what it means.
- Here is my conclusion: while there are some commendable exceptions, most evangelical denominations in Canada follow the pattern of history in placing great emphasis on justification and regeneration but neglecting adoption.
- The neglect of adoption can also be seen in the history of Christian books. Again, there are some commendable exceptions such as John Calvin and the Puritans.
 - The past fifty years, and especially the last 20 years, have also seen a rise in books on this subject but, speaking generally, adoption has been greatly neglected in the history of Christian literature.
- The same thing applies to songs and hymns. Many songs and hymns have been written that lift our hearts in praise to God for what he has done in creating the world, in justifying us, and in giving us the new birth.
 - But in my research I can only find a handful of hymns that are dedicated to the theme of adoption and even the most avid hymn lover would likely not have heard of them.
 - In the last few years there have been some contemporary songs that have addressed adoption but again there are very few songs that fill our hearts with praise to God for all he has done in adopting us into his family and the tremendous privileges that come with it.
- When I consider how highly Paul thinks of adoption, I cannot help but ask why adoption has been so neglected in the history of the Church.

CONCLUSION

- In the 1864 a Scottish theologian named Robert Candlish delivered some lectures in Edinburgh on “The Fatherhood of God.” He compared the great doctrines of the Bible to mines filled with precious metals. The early church fathers mined the doctrine of the Trinity and brought forth its vast treasures. The Reformers mined the doctrine of justification and gave us its incredible riches.
 - But Candlish argued that the mine of adoption has been largely undiscovered. It was his contention, and I share it, that there are great riches waiting to be discovered.
 - Whatever the reasons for its neglect, I believe that now is the time for adoption to be restored to its rightful place among the rich truths of the Church. It is, therefore, my intention in this series to sink new shafts into the mine of adoption in order to bring out some of its abundant riches. Join me in praying for this series that we might experience the life-transforming power of what it means to be adopted by God.

⁴ “The EFCC’s Official Statement of Faith,” EFCC, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.efccm.ca/wordpress/aboutus/learn-about-the-efcc/important-info/statement-of-faith/>.

⁵ “What We Believe,” Baptist General Conference of Canada, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.bgc.ca/about-us/what-we-believe>.

⁶ “Doctrine,” Church of the Nazarene Canada, accessed September 18, 2017, https://www.nazarene.ca/about_us.

⁷ “The Vineyard,” Vineyard Canada, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.vineyard.ca/about.php>.

⁸ “EMC Statement of Faith (Unabridged),” Evangelical Mennonite Conference, accessed October 21, 2017, <http://www.emconference.ca/about/what-we-believe/statement-of-faith-unabridged/>.

⁹ “Statement of Faith,” Canadian Baptists of Western Canada, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://cbwc.ca/about/>.

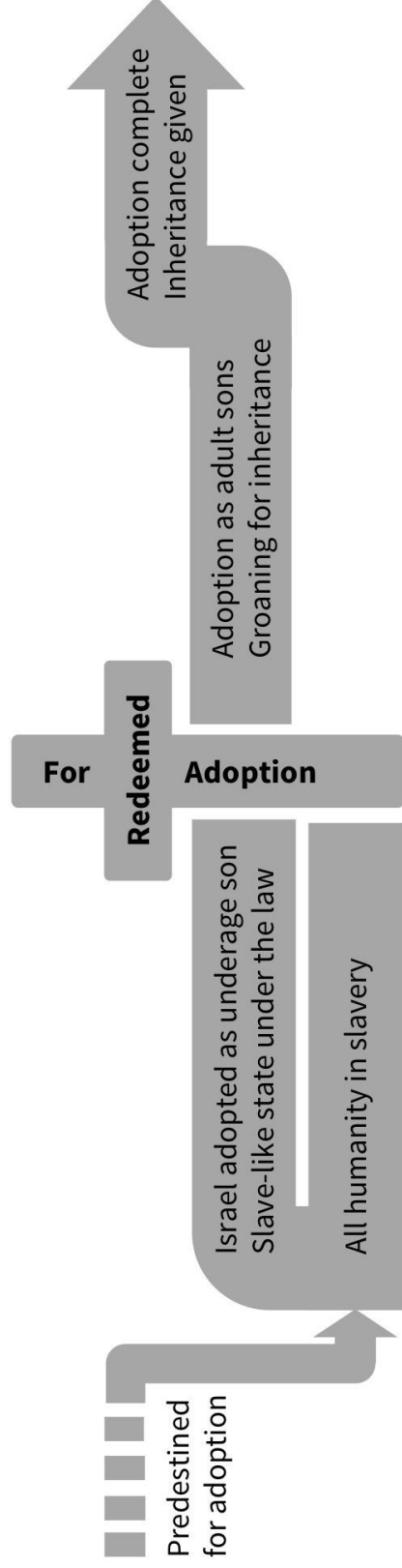
¹⁰ “Statement of Faith,” Calvary Chapel Association, accessed September 18, 2017, https://www.nazarene.ca/about_us.

¹¹ “What We Believe,” Canadian Foursquare Church, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.foursquare.ca/what-we-believe.html>.

¹² “Our Beliefs,” North American Baptist Conference, accessed October 21, 2017, https://nabconference.org/us/#our_beliefs.

Adoption as the Big Story of the Bible

CHAPTER 1	CHAPTER 2	CHAPTER 3	CHAPTER 4	CHAPTER 5
Before Creation (Eph 1:4-5)	Time of Slavery (Gal 4:1-3, 8-9; Rom 9:4)	Fullness of Time (Gal 4:4-5)	Time of Adoption (Gal 4:5-7; Rom 8:12-25)	New Creation (Rom 8:17-25; Eph 1:6a)



© 2018 Barton Priebe All Rights Reserved