



As a church, we are blessed to have so many families who have adopted children of their own. Karen and I prayed about adoption at one point but never felt led to move forward. This morning we are talking about spiritual adoption and I know that this doctrine is precious to every family who has experienced an adoption. There are a lot of parallels between the two and no one understands this better than a family who has adopted children.

One of the reasons we never pursued adoption is due to the inherent challenges in adopting children. As wonderful and amazing and important as it is, it's not for everyone. We learned that much from the process. Just this week I talked with 2 dads (not from Grace Church) who are struggling with their adopted children. One of the dads said, "You know, all of this makes hanging diapers so easy compared to this stuff!" Obviously, all parenting is hard work, but with adoption, there can be attachment issues. There can be birth mother issues, whether those are health problems or the issues associated with an open adoption. But for the family who adopts, it's all worth it. They tackle those just like any other parenting issue that arises with all of us.

There are not "problems" associated with spiritual adoption but there are problems with not understanding it and applying its truths. There are multiple benefits of being adopted into God's family. The bottom line of adoption is that "you get to go to heaven" but we need to see that there is much more to it than just that.

1. We receive a new Father.

Most families adopt children who could have been considered as orphans prior to the adoption. Because their parents passed away or because they created an unsafe environment for their children, the adopted children were all essentially orphaned in one way or another. But before we were adopted spiritually, you and I were not spiritual orphans. We had a family and we had a father. But it wasn't a good one.

Look what Jesus said to the Pharisees. "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires" (John 8:44).

Unfortunately, this same description was also true of us before we were saved. We were not orphans because the devil was our father and we followed after our father. This is what I shared last week from Ephesians 2. Notice especially the family language.

Ephesians 2-- *And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the **sons of disobedience**— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature **children of wrath**, like the rest of mankind.*

But adoption gives us a new father. We did not go from orphans to a father but rather we exchanged one father for another. Our new Father is perfect in every way.

As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.
For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust. (Psalm 103)

2. We are blessed in the Beloved.

Verse six says that we are blessed in the beloved. Who is the Beloved? The beloved is Jesus who is the Beloved of his Father. So here is more family language—the language of Father and Son. Immediately after Jesus' baptism, "a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, "a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 17:5).

Then Peter recalled the same event many years later.

"For when he received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain" (2 Peter 1:17-18).

We are blessed in the Beloved. As adopted sons and daughters, we have a new Father and we are blessed in the Beloved. I'm not sure many Christians understand the full impact of what this means. This is not just a fact about you but it has changed who you are. Your identity is completely different. You are a new creation and we need to see how relevant that is to our lives. If you walked in this reality, how might it affect your relationships? Think about a ten year-old boy being adopted into a family for the first time in his life. All he has known is orphanages. All he has known his entire life is large groups of boys running around with a few adults to supervise them. Even if there was an abundance of love there, just imagine how different his new family would be for him.

It's not likely his adjustment would be immediate. That's just too much change for a young boy so it would take a while for his new family to feel like a family. But given weeks and months, his new environment would start to feel like a family. What does family even feel like? What does

unconditional love from a mom and dad feel like? That would be all new to him but he would eventually start to adjust and most likely, enjoy being in this secure family environment.

How does he act differently than he did before? Does the way he see himself—is that any different do you think? He'll feel loved and accepted, won't he? He won't feel like he needs to earn love and acceptance because it is just given to him by the mere fact that he belongs to this new family. He won't have to act out to get attention anymore. Now he's still a ten year old boy and will have little boy behaviors. But if he truly feels secure in his family, his behavior will change. He will soon become a different little boy. His family environment, his relationship with his parents—these will alter his behavior in a very positive way.

I know very little about the subject of attachment disorders, but what I just described is the very opposite of attachment disorders. An adopted child must go through the process of attaching to his or her new family but sometimes they don't become attached or don't become fully attached. This can even happen in a non-adoptive family. It's not just adoption. There are some known causes but sometimes it doesn't appear to be anyone's fault that it happened. The parents of these children need to go above and beyond to help their son or daughter become attached to them. They have to work overtime to help their child feel accepted, secure and significant within their family.

I truly believe that many Christians have a spiritual attachment disorder. We don't know or don't feel like we are blessed in the beloved. We don't experience the truth of being adopted into a perfect spiritual family. We don't live in that familial love—which of course unlike the love of even the best human parents—this love is infinite and eternal. We don't feel attached so therefore we act as if we are not attached. We don't realize the depths of our security in the Beloved—in Jesus. We don't understand that our significance does not come from what we do but from what Christ has done. Often we feel like we still need to earn the Father's love. In our heads we know the gospel. On paper we know that we are saved by grace and not by works but in reality, we don't feel that way much of the time. We feel like the Father's love must be continually earned or else it will slip out of our hands.

That's not terribly surprising when we realize that most human relationships are like this. Most relationships have some sort of performance built into them. If a wife behaves in a certain way her husband will love and appreciate her more and the opposite is true as well. And of course this has to be true to some extent. There are behavioral standards in any relationship. If the husband comes home drunk half of the nights, that's a serious issue. Something has to change and the wife will inevitably begin to feel differently about her husband. It could even result in the end of that marriage. But even the best of relationships have performance built into them to some degree. If I perform in a certain way, if I behave in certain ways, I feel more accepted by the other person. This happens between husbands and wives and it happens between parents and children. So then what happens is that we transfer this insecurity and performance standards into our relationship with the Lord. We don't experience true unconditional love in the human realm so we don't expect it to be true in the divine realm, in the heavenly places as Paul calls it. Therefore, we end up with a spiritual attachment disorder. We don't feel truly attached to the Lord and this directly affects our behavior and level of obedience.

But there is a solution: we need to separate our identity in Christ from our fellowship with Christ. Our identity in Christ is all of these blessings, not just spiritual adoption. You may remember the handout I mentioned a few months back called, “33 Things that Happen at the Moment of Salvation.” There are still some copies in the literature rack in the lobby. All of these things together make up our identity in Christ. We see this all over the book of Ephesians and you see it highlighted in yellow in your bulletin insert last week. Our being chosen, our adoption, redemption, our inheritance—all of these are “in Christ.” We have been adopted and blessed “in the Beloved” which is also “in Christ.”

This is our identity in Christ and needs to be separated from our fellowship with Christ. Our identity never changes. It cannot change. The Father is not going to send you back to the spiritual orphanage, which in reality, would be handing you back over to Satan as your father. He will not un-adopt you. He will not reverse your redemption. He will not revoke your inheritance. He will not remove your heart of flesh and replace it with the original heart of stone. This is your identity in Christ and it is eternally secure, provided you are a true believer and have placed your faith in Christ alone.

Your identity in Christ can never change but your fellowship with Christ does change. It changes all of the time. It is a relationship and you can either strengthen the relationship or you can weaken the relationship. But we confuse the two when we wrongly think that our identity is the thing that is changing. When we feel closer or further from the Lord relationally, it's our fellowship that is changing, not the fundamental security of our being “in Christ.”

In this sense, our identity in Christ and our fellowship with Christ need to be separated—separated in the sense that you understand that your level of fellowship changes but your identity cannot. But in another sense, we must never separate them, because our fellowship flows out of our identity. If you are absolutely secure in your relationship with Christ, this is what gives you the freedom and the motivation to serve him and obey him. This is the power of adoption. The child who is attached to his parents and family will thrive. A child who is not attached, adopted or otherwise, will tend to struggle. Our spiritual adoption grants us entrance into God's family. We are accepted and secure but we may not feel accepted and secure. Our fellowship with Christ is founded upon and flows out of our identity in Christ. The certainty of our secure relationship leads to deeper fellowship. And the reverse is true. A lack of certainty of our secure relationship does not lead to deeper fellowship.

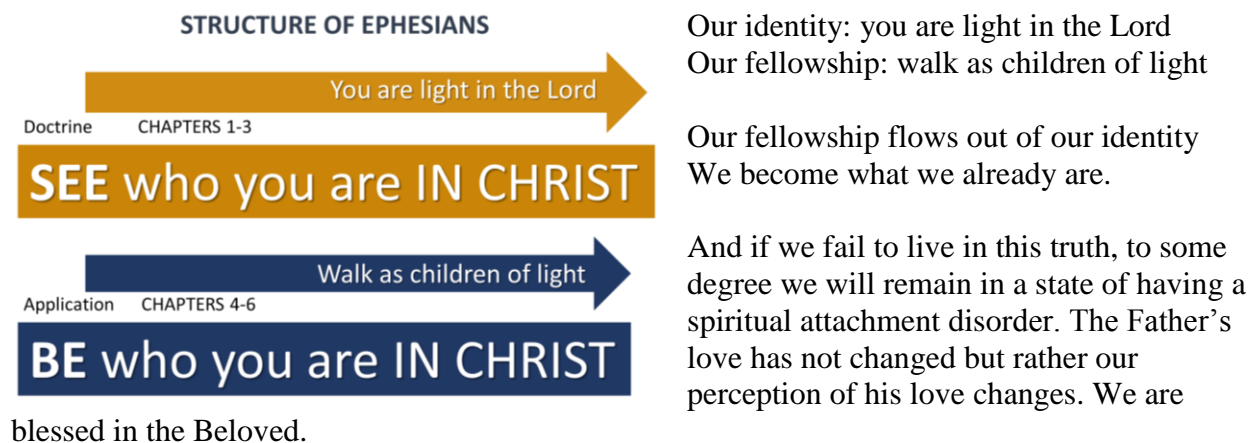
Listen to Paul's application in chapter five. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:1-2). We are to imitate God, but why? Because we are beloved children. Do you see the connection here? Our identity in Christ—who we are, our very nature is that we are beloved children. He doesn't mention adoption here in chapter five because he already established it in chapter one. But notice, we are not just children but beloved children. In chapter one we were adopted and blessed in the Father's Beloved child, which is Jesus. And in chapter five we are beloved children. The exact same word is used for us.

You probably know the word *agape*, one of the Greek words for love. The word for beloved, when used for both Jesus and us is the word *agape*. Paul took the verb *agape* and turned it into a

noun. Beloved—you are the loved one. You are beloved. Contrary to popular belief, agape is not a special divine kind of love as opposed to others kinds of love. It’s not the word choice that matters here but the One who is doing the loving. You are beloved by the Father. As believers we are beloved by the Father just as the Son is Beloved by the Father.

Now getting back to our verse. “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” We are to imitate God because we are beloved. Our behavior flows directly out of our identity. What we do is based on who we are. We see it again in the second half of that same verse. “And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Christ loved us and gave himself up for us. Therefore, we are to walk in love. First, we receive a new identity and then based on that identity, we are to walk in love. We don’t walk in love in order to earn Christ’s sacrifice. We walk in love because he has already sacrificed himself for us.

It’s not just that God loved us first, therefore we love. But God loved us first which gave us a new identity. His love changed our very essence. We are adopted sons and daughters. We have a new Father. We are new creations. His love changed us and based upon this infinite love and supernatural change in us, we imitate God and walk in love. A few verses later in chapter five, Paul wrote, “At one time you were darkness but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). The command is to walk as children of light but only because we are now children of light. And most importantly, we were not always this way. We were darkness. Notice we did not merely live in darkness, we were darkness. Darkness was our identity just as the devil was our father. But in Christ, all of that changes.



3. We receive a new family.

Who is your spiritual family? Your spiritual family is the universal church throughout the globe and throughout the ages. We will be celebrating with this family—in all of its skin colors and languages and beauty—for all eternity. That will be amazing and the joy of your new family will never end. However, as is always the case, the best manifestation of the universal church is always the local church. Our larger family—our first and second cousins in you will—are all believers everywhere. But our immediate family is the local church. If we all have the same Father then we are all family, all adopted sons and daughters of our same Father.

This is another reason why we should all strive to make, not just *the* church but specifically *this* church into a loving, safe family. It's a radical concept, but God's intention is that we are the family of God. You see, the command to walk in love as Beloved children is a plural command. You—all of you—all of us—walk in love. Make this church into a glorious family of God. The love of this family should be as safe and secure as the Father's love. It never will be this side of Heaven, but that is our aim. We imitate God by being a family.

But that's messy, isn't it? There will always be conflict in our big family. Which is why Biblical conflict resolution is so important to follow. It's easy to value love for your church family when everyone gets along and there's nothing but smooth sailing. But conflicts are the true test of our love for one another. It's then that our love is most tested and most in peril. It's then that we must double our efforts to walk in love and work out conflicts.

This is the reason Paul linked the Lord's Supper so strongly with love for one another. In 1 Corinthians, we are warned not to "eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner" (1 Cor. 11:27). We are warned to examine ourselves before we remember the blood and body of Jesus and his sacrifice. Of course we should examine ourselves for any unrepentant sin but in the context of 1 Corinthians 11, the sin is the sin of division within the body. The sin is a lack of love for one another. And this makes perfect sense because Jesus' death and resurrection did not just save us as individuals but saved us into a family. We will always have conflict but if we refuse to reconcile that conflict, then we'd better not celebrate the Lord's Supper. That would be dishonoring the Lord's Supper because sharing in the table is a sign of unity. But if we intentionally hold onto conflict, we turn the table into a lie.

4. We receive loving chastisement.

Hebrews 12 details the loving chastisement of our Father.

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:7-11)

Family is always a package deal. If you want the security and love you get loving chastisement thrown in. It's a necessity. And we've got to change our way of thinking here. When we face hard times, often our first thought is, "Why would God allow this to happen to me?" We think in those moments that God has abandoned us when in reality, it is at that moment that he is treating us as sons and daughters. Discipline process intimacy and security.

5. We have hope for our adoption and final resurrection.

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.*

Now how is that we have been predestined for adoption but Romans 8 seems to be saying that our adoption is still in the future. I told you last week that this stuff plays with the time-space continuum! This is the tension between the “already but not yet.” We have already been adopted from before the foundation of the world, yet our adoption is not complete. There is an already but not yet aspect to all parts of our salvation. But here, adoption is specifically tied to our resurrected bodies. Our final resurrection is always the end of our salvation. Jesus exists in a physical body and you and I will have physical, resurrected bodies for all eternity.

This means that we will be able to literally give Jesus a hug. And he can hug us. I’m not going to make that into an absolute but it certainly makes sense. Lucy and Susan hugged Aslan. ;-)
But whether we do or not, I believe that just being in the Lord’s presence will be like a warm embrace, a powerful hug of pure love and safety.

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