

Ephesians 1v3-10
Fathers' Day sermon on Adoption
Given at Friars Baptist Church - 15th June 2008

Intro

[It'd be great if you could keep that passage from Ephesians open in front of you, otherwise I could be telling you anything...]

If you've been in, well, any shop over the past few weeks, you'll have been reminded that today is **Fathers' Day**. My mum started reminding me about a month ago! I'm a great believer in taking these special days that everyone celebrates, and thinking about them from a Christian point of view. To me, Fathers' day seems like an obvious thing for Christians to celebrate. OK, maybe it's an American import. Maybe it was just set up as a male rival to mothers' day. But so what? It seems to me that, as Christians, Fathers' Day should make us stop and think about the greatest Father in the universe.

Obviously we talk about God the Father as part of the Trinity – the Father of Christ. But when we speak of God as 'our Father,' it's tempting to use the title in a very general sense. God made everything, so God is the 'Father' of everything. But that isn't what *Christians* should mean when they call God 'Father.' Christians have a special right to call God their Father because he has *adopted* them. If you're a Christian, then you're adopted - you've been adopted by God into his family. Did you realise that? If you did, then do you realise what it means? I honestly believe that this is one of the most beautiful aspects of the gospel. Jim Packer, in his book *Knowing God* calls it “*the highest privilege that the gospel offers.*” I agree completely. And so that's what I want to talk about this morning – our 'adoption' by God. And I hope you'll see just how high this privilege is...

There's a lot I could say about adoption. But I'm going to limit myself to saying *5 things* about adoption.

First, we're adopted through God's grace.

If we're Christians then we're adopted by God. Have a look at the end of verse 4: “*In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will...*” Here, Paul is writing to Christians. When he says 'us,' he means Christians. All Christians are adopted by God. But what does that mean?

When we talk about 'adoption,' we mean that a child is made a part of someone else's family. They may not be flesh and blood, but when a child is adopted they are *legally* made one of the family. We're familiar with it today, but adoption isn't a recent invention – it was common in the ancient world too, and so Paul uses it as a crystal-clear picture of how God welcomes believers into his family.

Think about that for a second. That should boggle your mind, and if it doesn't the rest of this sermon will be a bit pointless. We're talking about the almighty creator of the universe bringing us into his family. The reason it's mind-boggling is because of how we've treated God. The Bible says that, if we're left to our own devices, we're God's **enemies**. We've turned our backs on him to go and live our own way. *Thanks, but no thanks, I can take care of myself.* But God welcomes people like us into his family. But we aren't just welcomed in as servants doing the housework. Our identity is changed, and we become part of the royal family! If that doesn't make your heart swell, I don't know what will!

And that's one of the key points we have to realise in all of this: we're adopted because God *chose* to adopt us. We're **only** adopted because he **chose** to do it.

When a child is adopted, he doesn't find some parents, decide he wants to live with them, fill in a form and join their family. It *has* to happen the other way. Parents choose to adopt a child and go through the legal process to make that child part of their family. It has to be intentional. That's how it works with God's family too.

Look at verse 5 again. God “predestined us” to be adopted (which means he planned ahead). Verse 4 tells us he did it before he'd even created the world. Do you realise what that means? Before he'd even started creating the world, God decided he was going to adopt outsiders into his family. This wasn't an afterthought. We didn't scupper his plans so he had to think of something else. He always intended to do this.

And look at his reasons. At the end of verse 4, we're told he did it “*in love.*” And in verse 5 we're told he did it “*in accordance with his pleasure and will.*” This was completely God's choice, and he chose to do it because he loves us. It pleased him to do it. He wanted to do it.

The bottom line is: this is all about God's grace, His undeserved generosity towards us.

And grace is a great thing for our adoption to be based on. This is why I described adoption as **beautiful**. It means that there are no hoops for us to jump through before we're adopted. It means that there's no list of conditions we have to meet. This is about God's goodness and love.

But, once we're adopted, this should keep us level-headed too. Don't slip into thinking that God adopted you because you're more lovable. And don't slip into thinking you have to prove to God that he made the right choice in adopting you. If you do, you're making it about you instead of about God. Equally, don't start to think that if you mess up, that's it. God takes us on as damaged goods. He lavishes his grace on us. And that grace continues once we're part of the family.

I should say here that I don't know any of you, and I don't know your family situations. I'm aware that, for some of you, the idea of adoption might be difficult. And, particularly, it might be tough for you to think of God as your Father, because your own father didn't give you a very good impression of what a father should be like. Well, what I'll say is this: God is so much better than a human father. For those of us who have brilliant Dads, you should look at him and realise that he isn't a patch on your heavenly Father. But if your father wasn't all that good, then remember that God has none of the failures our sinful human fathers do. If you're a Christian, God has willingly, gladly brought you into his family. He wants you there. He loves you, and he's going to care for you.

Having seen that we're adopted because of God's grace, we have to ask the question *how did it happen?* What did it take for him to do it? Well, **we're adopted because of Jesus Christ**

It took the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God gave his one and only son, so that we could become his children too. In him (in Jesus Christ) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (v7).

A while ago I went to a meeting where the talk was about God being a Father to us. But I was astonished that Jesus was only mentioned once in passing in a 40minute talk! One comment stuck

in my mind. The speaker said, “1 John 4 **just** says, 'God is love.'” NO IT DOESN'T! You can have a look. It says God is love. But it **also** says, “*This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.*”

God didn't just shrug and forget everything that happened! He couldn't. And who would want a God like that anyway? If he did that, he would have to be a God who doesn't care about evil, doesn't care about sin. But he isn't like that. He dealt with the stuff that kept us out of his family. The Lord Jesus gave his life to take away that stuff so that we could become part of God's family.

And so we can't talk about God as our Father, and we can't talk about our adoption as God's children, without mentioning Jesus! It's through his blood, through his sacrifice as he died on the cross, that we can be adopted as children of God. This shows us just what it cost for God to adopt us. Which is evidence of just how much he wanted to do it. *This is God's grace again.*

So what does this mean for us? If we're adopted, how does it change things?

It changes **everything**. When we're adopted by God, he doesn't just grudgingly let us into the family home. We're given the status and privilege of being adopted into the Royal Family!

We're adopted, so our future is secure.

The passage says we're adopted as **sons**. It's trendy to try and take that out, to say we're adopted as 'children,' because it's sexist to talk about sons. But if we do that, we miss something important. We're all adopted as **sons** (women included), because we're adopted as **heirs**. Romans 8 (another great passage about adoption) says that, if we're Christians, then we're “heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.” That's the status we're elevated to.

So if we're heirs, what's our inheritance? Well, verses 13 and 14 give us a clue.

The first thing they say is that the Holy Spirit *guarantees* our inheritance. We're “*marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of His glory.*” The Holy Spirit acts as a **seal** – he marks us as part of God's family. The Holy Spirit lives in all Christians, and only Christians. So He marks those who are Christians, who've believed in the Lord Jesus and been adopted into God's family.

And He is a **deposit** – a downpayment if you like. Imagine you're buying something big like a house or a car. You pay a deposit to guarantee that the rest of the money will follow. This payment is a taste of what's to come. The Holy Spirit, living in us, is a foretaste of the inheritance we'll receive. The presence of the Holy Spirit now guarantees our future. And He guarantees it *until the redemption of those who are God's possession* (v14). The Holy Spirit guarantees a future where the effects of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus will be completed. When every trace of evil will be removed from the world, and we'll spend eternity face-to-face with God. A future which is only possible because God has graciously adopted us. The presence of the Holy Spirit is a foretaste of that future, a hint of eternity, which is our inheritance.

Now we've seen how and why God adopts us, I think it would be strange to be talking about all of this and not reflect on how adopting children fits in. The truth is, we see all of this in a small way when we adopt children ourselves. I said it was the perfect image for Paul to use, and it's still the perfect image for us to understand this. Whenever a Christian family adopts a child, they have an opportunity to show what God did for us. I have some friends who adopted a child. And in doing it, they were imitating the way God adopted us. They wilfully adopted their daughter, and brought her into their family. Her identity was changed – she was made a full member of the family with all the privileges that go with it. It was costly – they had to give things up, and their life hasn't

been the same since. But in love they took her in and made her one of the family. Now as I look at their family, it helps me to understand and appreciate what God has done. If *you're* adopted, or if *you've* adopted children, then you're displaying this in miniature. As Christians, we should have an incredibly high view of adoption. For us, it's not second best. It's not something to be ashamed of – it's the heart of the gospel we build our lives on!

So, God chose to adopt us, and through the death and resurrection of Christ it's possible. And because we're adopted, we have this future reality to look forward to. But if we aren't careful, we can make this all about something which happened in the past and something which will happen in the future. What about now? Well, **we're adopted, so we should demonstrate it in our lives.**

In the mean time, this should be life-changing. We're talking about so much more than a God who steps down every now and then to give us a cuddle when things get scary. Jim Packer says in "Knowing God" that if this is true, then the whole of our Christian lives should be shaped by it. It's the fundamental basis of how we live as Christians, as we relate to God as our Father. We aim to **please him** as we would a Father. We aim to **imitate him**, as we would a Father. We live **trusting Him**, as we would a Father. Do you see how, if we really take this on board, it will affect every aspect of how we live.

Verse 8 of Ephesians 1 says that in adopting us, God has lavished the riches of his grace on us. I love that phrase. He's gone "over the top" with the grace he's poured out on us in bringing us into his family. No expense spared! *That should move us.* That should have an impact on us.

I think there's one particular way it should move us. This grace, which God lavished on us, should inspire us to **mission**. It should make us want to share this with other people. God has been so, so good to us that we should want to shout it from the roof tops. Not because we're special, because we've seen that it's nothing to do with us. We should want to tell people because God is so good, and we want people to know, and because we want people to **know Him!** We're like street urchins who've found a loving home with plenty of room left inside. We can't just sit inside and keep it to ourselves – we have to go out into the street and tell our fellow urchins all about it!

God adopts all kinds of people. True, God has chosen people to adopt, but we have no idea who they are. As far as we're concerned, the offer is open to everyone. Age, sex, nationality, background, none of it matters. Just look around the room. And remember that meetings like this will be happening right across the world. If you're a Christian, the very fact you are is a testimony to the fact that God will let anyone in!

How can we keep this amazing grace to ourselves? The privilege of being adopted by God brings a responsibility – we have to let the rest of the world know!

That really leads me on to **the last point I want to make**. You might have heard me talking this morning and thought, "*I don't know what he's going on about.*" Perhaps as I've talked about Christians being adopted, you've thought, "*well, that doesn't include me.*" And maybe as I've described the wonder of adoption and God's overflowing generosity, you've been thinking, "*I wish that was me.*"

Let me say this to you. As I've said over and over this morning, God adopts people into his family because he loves us. He made it possible by giving up his own son to die – he loves us *that* much. When Jesus died, he made it possible for things to be put right between us and God. And so, if we

trust in the Lord Jesus, we can become part of his family.

If you *haven't* done that, you need to know you're very welcome to join the family. God's goodness, which none of us deserve, is available to you too. Jesus died and rose again so that people like you could be made right with God, and so you could be called a child of God. All you have to do is accept the offer. And then the family name becomes yours. You become an heir of God and a co-heir with Christ. And that inheritance, that future hope becomes yours too.

I said at the beginning that this is a beautiful truth – I hope you'll agree with me that I wasn't overstating it. This really is, as Packer says, “*the highest privilege that the gospel offers.*” We can call God our Father, because he adopts us – a massive act of grace which is made possible by the Lord Jesus. An act of grace which should change the way we live, and which should send us out to invite others in. And that invitation is there for any of you who need to accept it.

“In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will - to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”