

Family Matters

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

(Genesis 1:27 ESV)

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

(Proverbs 22:6 ESV)

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,
and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

(Matthew 10:37 ESV)

*But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household,
he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

(1 Timothy 5:8 ESV)

Adoption

October 8th, 2017

Galatians 4:1-7

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Galatians 4:1-7, that's on page 974 in your pew Bibles. For the last couple of weeks we've been working our way through a series called "Family Matters". We've talked about marriage, parenting, loss, singleness and celibacy and this week we are going to be talking about adoption. With each of these topics we've been working a dual agenda. We have been speaking practically about family matters. The Bible is not just a book about how to get saved, its also a book about how to LIVE as a saved person and so it has wonderful, practical, wise and prudent things to say about family but it also uses those teachings about family to point us back towards ultimate things. Family is not ultimate in the Bible. It's important but it's not ultimate. Our relationship with God through Christ is ultimate – family is immediate – meaning it is the thing we tend to think about first and most – but the Bible uses this important and immediate concern to lift our thoughts higher – to ultimate and absolute things. We saw that for example with marriage. The Apostle Paul said a bunch of really helpful things about marriage. He told husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and wives to respect their husbands but then he said:

This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:32–33 ESV)

The ultimate meaning in what I'm saying has to do with Christ and the church – nevertheless, at the practical level, husbands should love their wives and wives should respect their husbands. He's moving back and forth from the immediate and practical to the ultimate and absolute and we will do the same in our conversation today.

Adoption is a really important and urgent issue in this country. There are hundreds and thousands of children in Canada awaiting adoption. When my wife and I were going through our own adoption process we had to leaf through the big blue binder of kids that were still waiting for a forever home in our community. I've never forgotten that experience. This is an urgent and important issue AND it is used in the Bible to point us towards ultimate and absolute issues.

We'll use Galatians 4:1-7 as a foundation for this conversation and we will dip into a few other places in the Scriptures as well as we wrestle with what this metaphor means, how adoption works and how this doctrine should affect us as Bible believing Christians. Hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1.

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. 3 In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1–7 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

What Does The Metaphor Mean?

Now Paul introduces the concept of adoption into another conversation about the relationship of the believer to the Old Testament law. He's trying to help people understand who they are now as saved people, trusting in the life, death, resurrection and intercession of Jesus Christ. Who are we now? That was the question and adoption is part of Paul's answer. Look at verse 7 again. He says:

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. (Galatians 4:1–7 ESV)

Paul is drawing here upon a long tradition within Judaism of understanding redemption and salvation through the lens of legal adoption. Paul did this all the time. In Romans when he is talking about all the advantages that Jews have, humanly speaking, that should have helped them understand the person and work of Christ, he says:

They are Israelites, and to them belong **the adoption**, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:4–5 ESV)

Paul says, you guys have been through this before! The great Old Testament act of salvation was also an act of adoption! He’s talking of course about the Exodus. Remember the Jews were slaves in Egypt. They were weak, they were oppressed, they were alone in the world – nobody cared about them. They were the labour force of a more significant people – historically speaking. And then God CLAIMS THEM AS HIS OWN. In Exodus 4:22 God says to Moses:

Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, 23 and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’” (Exodus 4:22–23 ESV)

Everything changed for Israel when God adopted them and became their champion and took up their cause as his own! Before God did that – they were nothing. They were helpless and they were alone. But then God adopted them. He said: you are my son and whoever messes with you messes with me.

Now, don’t be turned off by the masculine imagery. The Bible tells this story multiple times and switches back and forth between male and female imagery. In Ezekiel 16 God says to the Jewish people:

And as for your birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths. 5 No eye pitied you, to do any of these things to you out of compassion for you, but you were cast out on the open field, for you were abhorred, on the day that you were born.

6 “And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ 7 I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. (Ezekiel 16:3–7 ESV)

This time God describes his intervention as being like a man who came across an abandoned

baby girl. In those days many poor families would expose infant baby girls because they were too expensive to raise and they couldn't help out on the farm in the same way that a boy could – this still happens today in many places in the world. These babies were exposed to the elements and left to die but God says, I came and found you. I took compassion on you. I raised you and made you flourish. You became tall and beautiful and I protected you.

These are the ways that salvation is described in the Old Testament and these metaphors get picked up and used again in the New Testament. In the Bible to speak of our salvation as adoption is to say that we were once helpless, we were once poor, we were once slaves – that is what got Paul thinking along these lines in Galatians 4. He is saying to the Galatians that they were once slaves! They were slaves to elementary forces. They were not free. They were subject to lusts and desires and principles and assumptions that led them terribly astray. That led them into destructive life styles. They weren't free! They were making choices but they were all wrong choices and they didn't have the power or the opportunity to choose anything different. They were slaves.

To speak of our salvation therefore as adoption is to speak about rescue. It is to speak about a God who takes pity on us and who lifts us out of our bondage and confusion and perversion and who cleans us up and sets us free and who teaches us, slowly but surely to live as free men and women. It is a rags to riches story. It is about poor, helpless people being adopted into the richest and noblest family in the world! It is about slaves becoming sons and daughters of the King.

We used to sing about that. Joint heirs with Jesus as we travel this sod, I'm so glad I'm apart of the family of God. That's what this metaphor means.

Thanks be to God!

How Does Adoption Work?

Now the second question we want to ask is "How does adoption work?" Specifically, how did it work in the ancient world? The most important thing for us to understand here is that it was a legal contract. Generally speaking adoption in the ancient world was about passing on assets, estates and land. In fact many adoptions in the ancient world involved adult children. If a Roman

man did not have a biological child he would adopt a younger person – usually a nephew or a second cousin but there are many documented cases of a rich, noble Roman adopting a slave and making that slave his legal heir. The adopted child became the legal child and heir of that person in every sense of the word.

The Bible takes that seriously – very seriously. Remember friends that Jesus was adopted. He was the Son of David in the sense that he was legally adopted by Joseph. Remember the miracle of Jesus' life begins with the miracle of the Virgin Birth. Jesus was biologically Mary's son but not biologically Joseph's son – Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit - but the Bible in both Luke and Matthew presents Jesus as the Son of David through his legal adoption by Joseph. Jesus was the Son of David because he was adopted by Mary's fiance Joseph – that's how seriously the Bible takes legal adoption.

Our entire theology is constructed on this reality.

When Jesus was adopted by Joseph he assumed all of Joseph's legal liabilities and assets – including his claim on the Davidic throne.

So let me break this down for you – adoption in the Biblical sense – means a total merger of assets, liabilities and legal claims. Thus, when you are adopted by God, through faith in Jesus Christ – all your legal debts are assumed by God and all the assets and riches of God are assumed by you. That is what theologians refer to as the Great Exchange. We put our debts on Christ on the cross – when we confess our sins the total liability of those sins is applied to Christ. His death on the cross becomes our payment for those sins and they are no more. Further, when we are joined to Christ through faith, everything that he earned by his perfect obedience is transferred to our account. Everything God gives to Jesus – his only begotten Son – is now shared with everyone who is united to Christ through faith – his legally adopted sons and daughters. That's how adoption works! God assumes your debts and you inherit his assets.

That's why this metaphor is so beloved in the Bible. It is the Gospel in one glorious image.

That leads us to our third question:

How Should This Doctrine Affect Us?

Doctrines in the Bible are not there merely to be analysed and appreciated they are there to be experienced and enjoyed. God wants you to do more than believe that you can be adopted, God wants you to EXPERIENCE ADOPTION and to DELIGHT IN ADOPTION. That's why Paul says in Galatians 4:

And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:6 ESV)

God wants you to do more than believe this he wants you to FEEL THIS and so he sends the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying "Abba! Father!". The Spirit of the Only Begotten Son of God comes into our hearts and immediately opens a dialogue with the God as our Father. He teaches us how to address God in the most intimate and familial terms.

Have you ever thought of that? Job 1 of the Holy Spirit is making you feel like you belong.

1. It should make us feel like we belong

I love how the Apostle Paul puts it in Ephesians 1. He says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as 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 adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:3-5 ESV)

God loved us – he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world – to be his children in holiness, before him FOREVER. This was the purpose of his will.

God wants you here. God chose you before the foundation of the world – that is to say, before you were born. Before you were a twinkle in your earthly daddy's eye – you were the apple of your heavenly Father's eye. Before you did anything, good or bad, your heavenly father LOVED YOU. And he went to great lengths to bring you into this family – so you better believe that you belong. Don't you ever doubt that!

You know, one of the fears you have when you think about adoption as a parent is whether or not you will feel any different towards your adopted child. Will you love your adopted child as much as your biological child? I wondered about that.

Some of you may know our story. My wife and I fostered 16 children over a 9 year stretch. We had two biological children of our own and so it was a very busy house in the early days. At one point we had 5 children under the age of 7 in our home; 2 biological and 3 foster children. Our adopted daughter Mikayla was the youngest of those 5 children. She came to us as a baby and we were told that we would only have her for 6 months. We were happy to have her in our home, part of our mission as a family was to provide the benefit, safety and love of a family unit to little people who did not have that – who had never had it – and who might not ever have it again. Most of the kids that we had in our house were only there for a short time. We had children with us for a weekend and we had children with us for 3 years – depending on how long it took for their biological parents to get things in place or for some other relatives to step forward and provide for them.

In Mikayla's situation after she had been with us for about 18 months we were told that she was going to be put up for adoption. By this point we had fallen completely in love with her and the thought of being parted from her was too horrifying to even think about so we asked if we could adopt her. We were told that we could apply but we were also told that the preference of the adoption board would always be to place children with parents of the same colour and as you've probably noticed my wife and I are unhelpfully white. But nevertheless we wanted to go for it. We didn't think she would care what colour we were because she would know that we have loved her from the first time we saw her. So we prayed about it and the next day we put our names in. We didn't know where we would come up with the money but the next day at church a family came up to us out of the blue and said that if we were thinking about adopting her they would pay for the entire process. We took that as confirmation and we went forward and about 18 months later we signed the paper work and she was legally ours.

And I remember one day thinking about whether I felt any different about her than I did about my other children – I wanted to know – and so I looked into myself and did an inventory of my feelings and I discovered that there wasn't an ounce of difference. Whether it was this womb, that womb or a test tube – it didn't make any difference to me. She was mine because God gave her to

me. And that was that.

Reality conditions feeling.

I feel like she is my daughter because SHE IS. Legally and spiritually and in every sense that matters.

And that is what the Holy Spirit does in the heart of a saved person. Slowly but surely he makes you FEEL what IS. You ARE a child of God in every sense of the word. It doesn't matter what you once were. It doesn't matter where you came from. It matters who you are now. And the first job of the Holy Spirit is helping you believe that and feel that.

Thanks be to God!

The second way this doctrine should affect us is by making us feel grateful.

2. It should make us feel grateful

You can't pay God back for his grace in your life. He doesn't need anything and you don't have anything that he didn't give you. Just like you can't take your allowance and give it to your parents and thereby pay them back – neither can you give God anything in return for what he has given you. You don't have anything and he doesn't need anything. You can't earn your salvation and you can't pay God back for your salvation.

So the only response that you can make is gratitude. In the Bible God says:

The one who offers thanksgiving as his sacrifice glorifies me (Psalms 50:23 ESV)

Just say thank you. That's all you need to do. Just receive what God has done in Christ for you and say thank you. Thank you is the essential expression of the Christian faith. Thank you is the name of the central Christian rite and sacrament. The word "Eucharist" is Greek for thank you. Now maybe we shouldn't be using Greek words anymore because not too many people speak ancient Greek nowadays – we should probably just call the Table – the Thank You Table –

because that's what it is. It is us remembering what God has given and saying – thank you. Thank you! Thanks be to God!

Thirdly, understanding this metaphor and this great salvation that we have should make us feel noble:

3. It should make us feel noble

Paul talks about that in Ephesians. In chapter 4 verse 1 he says:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1–3 ESV)

The entirety of Christian ethics can be summed up in one line: **LIVE LIKE WHO YOU ARE!** You are sons and daughters of the King – live like that! Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called. You have been called out of slavery and into nobility – live like who you are! Don't roll around in the mud like a slave – walk like a man – walk like a woman – walk like a free and noble child of God!

Sanctification is a big, fancy Christian word which just means slowly but surely becoming who we ARE. As Christians we are brothers and sisters of Jesus – **RIGHT NOW**. We are joint heirs – **RIGHT NOW**. Joint heirs with Jesus when? **AS WE TRAVEL THIS SOD**. Right now! We are sons and daughters of the King and brothers and sisters of Christ. And yet, we are also becoming those things practically and experientially. The Apostle Paul says:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:17–18 ESV)

Did you hear that? Paul says, if you have the Spirit then you are already free. You're not a slave anymore. You are a son or daughter of the King and the job of the Spirit is to make you more and more like who you are – children of the King. All the adopted children are learning how to behave by watching the only begotten Son so that, slowly but surely, we can become what we already ARE. Men and women; sons and daughters – created and called in the image and likeness

of God.

Understanding the doctrine of adoption should make you want to live and walk like who you are.

Lastly, this doctrine should also make us feel generous.

4. It should make us feel generous

When you understand what you've been given, you want to share that generously with other people. In fact the whole Christian life comes down to living like who you are and giving as you have received. Jesus said to his disciples:

freely ye have received, freely give. (Matthew 10:8 KJV)

When you think about who you were and how God has saved you and what God has made you a part of, then you want to turn around and give that freely to other people. In fact Jesus said that if you don't want to do that it proves that you don't really understand what God has done for you. That's the punch line of the parable of the unmerciful servant. The king says to the man upon whom he had mercy:

should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' (Matthew 18:33 ESV)

Shouldn't you treat other people the way I have treated you – that's what your Christian faith is supposed to DO TO YOU! It is supposed to make you want to treat other people the way God in Christ has treated you!

And that takes us back to where we started this morning. In Galatians 4 Paul has been trying to explain to people that they are no longer under the power of the law. The law was like an electric fence that marked off how God wanted people to live but it also kept human beings in a type of slavery. It FORCED them to do right – even if they didn't want to. And Paul says, "That's what is different about you now! Now, as saved people, you should WANT TO! You don't need the law anymore! You've out grown it! Slaves need the law – but sons and daughters need only love, gratitude and MEMORY. Just remember who you are and remember what God has done. Live

like who you are and treat others the way God in Christ has treated you.

That is the Christian life in a nutshell. No one put it more succinctly than James, the brother of Jesus. He said:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world. (James 1:27 NRSV)

You don't need the law anymore, just remember this: You are a child of your Father. So keep yourself unstained by the world. Don't live at the level of your animal lusts. Live like a son or daughter of the King. And remember what that King did for you. How he had pity on you, how he was merciful to you and how he took you into his family. Remember that and DO THAT now for others. Have mercy on widows and orphans. Visit the old in their homes. Bring the young into your homes.

This is right religion. This is how you live as a son or a daughter of the king because this is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God, let's pray together.