

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Our Adoption As Sons of God" (Colossians 3:1-4, Galatians 3:26-4:7)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 1/5/2014

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Today we are continuing our study of the commandment that we find in the opening verses of Colossians chapter 3. If you are able to do so, I hope that you will follow along in your own copy of God's Word as we begin today. Let me read these verses for you once again. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

In this series of messages, we have seen that the imperative that we find in these verses, to seek those things which are above, and to set our minds on things above, and not on things on the earth, is a command of God that we find not only in Colossians chapter 3, but in many different ways throughout the Word of God.

We have seen this in the Old Testament prophets, in the Gospels, and in the book of Acts. And we are now seeing how this great truth of heavenly mindedness is a recurring theme in the Apostle Paul's letters to the various churches of the early New Testament period.

A Heaven-Bound Status, Guaranteed by God

And so we have been considering three propositions that we find repeated in many different ways in Paul's epistles to the churches. The first of those propositions is that

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believers in the Lord Jesus Christ presently possess the Heaven-bound status that is in Christ. We are, Ephesians chapter two tells us, seated in the Heavenly places with Christ Jesus. We are, as believers in Christ, positionally as close to God the Father as His own Son is. We have the same access to God the Father through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the present time we are focusing on a second proposition from the opening verses of Colossians chapter 3, and that is the great truth that we presently possess the guarantee of that future glory of which Paul speaks when he says that, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory." Ephesians chapter one tells us that the fact that we as believers now have God the Holy Spirit living within us is the down payment, or the guarantee, of that future glory.

In Colossians chapter one verse five, the Apostle Paul tells the Colossian believers that he gives thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for them, and prays for them, verse five, "because of the hope which is laid up for you in Heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel, which has come to you..."

This hope of future glory is a vital component of the Gospel message. In His death on the Cross, and His resurrection from the dead, our Lord Jesus Christ accomplished a redemption that will culminate in the consummation of this great hope of future glory that is stored up for us in Heaven, "where neither moth nor rust destroys and

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where thieves do not break in and steal," as Jesus tells us in Matthew chapter 6 verse 20. That is why our Lord says in that passage in Matthew chapter 6, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven..."

Undivided Loyalty

And this is why Paul gives us the same imperative by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in Colossians chapter 3: "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

This is the same thing that Jesus has said in Matthew six verse 21: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." And Jesus goes on in that same passage in Matthew chapter 6 to say this, verse 24: "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon."

You cannot serve both God and the things of this world. This is why we must "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." Our lives as Christians cannot be lives of divided loyalty. That is what will happen if our focus is on the things of this world. That is what will happen if the focus of the church is on the things of this world, and the philosophies of this world, and the ways of this world, and the things of which this world approves. The church's loyalty will be divided.

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Our Lord Jesus Christ, because He is indeed the *Lord* Jesus Christ, demands undivided loyalty. The Man of glory and the things of glory demand our undivided attention. And that focus must govern our thinking and living in this present world.

Turning To God From Idols

The Apostle Paul commended the church at Thessalonica for this very thing. He commended them because their loyalty was not divided. First Thessalonians chapter one verse nine: "[Y]ou turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and" – notice – "to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."

"You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." You forsook your allegiance to the things of this world. You now serve the living and true God, not the dead and false gods of this dying world. And your eyes are on Heaven. Not only did you turn from idols to serve the living and true God, but you are waiting for His Son from Heaven who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Glory At His Coming

In his second letter to the Thessalonian church, in chapter one verse seven, the Apostle Paul says that this great hope of the return of Christ who is now in Heaven means that He will

give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from Heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on

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those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

This is the promise, dear friends, for which we now have the down payment from God. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. He came the first time, as He says in John chapter 3, "not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." But He will come the second time, as we read in Thessalonians and elsewhere, in the flaming fires of vengeance against those who have persisted in their rejection of His person and His salvation.

But when He comes in judgment, He will also come with glory for His saints, for His true people, for His true church, for those who have believed in Him for salvation, for those who have been loyal to Him because of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for those who set their minds on things above, and not on the things of earth. God's work of justifying sinners, and sanctifying us, will be culminated when He glorifies us.

A Matter of Inheritance

This brings us to a third proposition concerning things above that we find in Paul's epistles to the churches. That is the fact that our Heaven-bound position in Christ – our position, as Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 of being "hidden with Christ in

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God" – is a matter of *inheritance*. Inheritance. We find the Apostle Paul speaking of this nearly a dozen times in his epistles to the churches.

Dear friends, the Christian has an eternal inheritance in Jesus Christ. This great truth that should motivate us to turn from the idols of this world and serve the living and true God. But we must also ask the question, Why do we have an inheritance in Heaven in Christ? The answer is that this inheritance is ours because every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is an adopted son of God. An adopted son of God.

Adoption: A Precious But Neglected Doctrine

The doctrine of adoption is a very precious doctrine. But we rarely hear anyone preach it these days. Very few Christians know the depths of the great truth of our adoption in Christ. God does not command our loyalty in the way that a dictator or an abusive father commands loyalty. Our holy God is not like that. He commands our loyalty by love. And the doctrine of our adoption as sons of God shows just how marvelous the love of God truly is.

We are born in sin. We are born condemned to eternal damnation in Hell. In that condition, God is our judge – our condemning judge. But through the Lord Jesus Christ, through the salvation that He has accomplished on the Cross, God the righteous judge has opened the way for us to come to Him in repentance, so that He will no longer be our condemning judge and we will no longer be guilty and condemned sinners.

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By faith, we have the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. By faith, as John chapter one verse 12 tells us, every individual who has received the Lord Jesus Christ as His Savior from the wrath of God is in this unique and blessed position: God has given us the right to become and to be called the children of God. God who was our condemning judge has become our loving Father because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for sinners. We have the right to be called the children of God because we have received the gift of adoption as sons of God.

A Doctrine We Must Understand

Dear friend, you need to truly understand this precious doctrine, the doctrine of our adoption as sons of God, if you are to truly understand why your focus should be on the things of Heaven and not on the things of earth. The love of God that He has shed abroad in giving us the gift of becoming His adopted sons is a priceless gift. How can we, in view of this great gift, do anything less than give God our undivided loyalty?

That is what I want to put before you. And so, as we consider Paul's third proposition, that we have an inheritance that is ours in the Heavens in Christ, I want to set this great doctrine of adoption before you, as we find it especially in the pages of Paul's epistles to the churches.

In doing this I would like for us to consider three questions together. First of all, how are believers adopted by God? Secondly, what does adoption mean for the believer's present life? And thirdly, what does adoption mean for the life to come?

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A Key Passage on Adoption

As we take up these questions, let me first of all call your attention to one of the key passages that presents this wonderful doctrine of adoption. We find it in the book of Galatians, in chapter 3 beginning at verse 26. I hope that you will turn there if you are able to as you listen today. I want to begin reading at Galatians 3:26, but the Holy Spirit's teaching on this particular subject actually continues into the next chapter. So we began at Galatians chapter 3, verse 26:

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

And then continuing in chapter 4:

Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.

Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, [notice] that we might receive the adoption as sons.

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And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

And so, dear friends, let me begin by giving you an overview of this great doctrine.

A Legal Act of God

Adoption is a legal act of God on our behalf, in the same way that our justification is a legal act of God on our behalf. Justification is legal language in Scripture. We stand before the judgment bar of God as hopeless sinners, condemned to death. We have nothing to offer for our own redemption.

But Christ has come. He has come into this world in a body of flesh. He has lived the perfect life that we could not live. He has died the death that we deserved to die – not merely physical death, but separation from God the Father. That is why Jesus cried out from the Cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?" Jesus has taken the full force of the wrath of God on our behalf. He has made full of atonement for our sins.

And so He offers to God the Father His perfect righteousness – His full atonement for our sins, and His perfect keeping of God's law, as our substitute. And so God the Father declares us not guilty. Not because we paid the penalty, not because we have a righteousness of our own, but only because of the perfect and complete work of His Son Jesus Christ on our behalf.

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And so, legally, we stand before God the Father clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. A legal transaction has been accomplished on our behalf in the courtroom of God.

And in the same way, adoption is legal language in Scripture. We see this in the passage we read a few moments ago in the book of Galatians. Note chapter 4, verses four and five: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Adopted As Sons

We are adopted as *sons*. We need to be very careful here to say exactly what Scripture actually says, and to understand why Scripture puts it this way. Today many people, even in the church, want us to use so-called gender neutral versions of the Bible that remove all the masculine and feminine references. They want us to take the course of political correctness in order to please the unsaved world.

But dear friends, to take such a course may be politically correct but it is not Biblically correct. We must completely and utterly reject that kind of thinking. We must be loyal to the Word of God.

Here in this passage in Galatians, we have one of the strongest arguments for loyalty to the Word of God as it is written. In the original language, the wording here is clearly masculine. The word that is translated "adoption" here in Galatians is the

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Greek word that means, literally, "to be placed as a son." And in Galatians chapter four verse four, the word is translated "the adoption of *sons*." The word is always clearly masculine. It signifies not merely adoption as children, not adoption as sons and daughters, but adoption as *sons*.

As it concerns our redemption, we who are in Christ, men and women and boys and girls alike, are all adopted by God as *sons*. In that sense, as Paul says here in Galatians, "there is neither male nor female."

Now why is this important? We need to remember that the Apostle Paul is writing to people who were under the rule of the Roman Empire. They were subject to Roman law. Now, we also see forms of adoption practiced in the Old Testament, but there was no mention of precisely this kind of adoption in the Mosaic law. The illustration that Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is using here in Galatians and elsewhere in his epistles, is clearly the Roman law of adoption of sons. That is what the people who received Paul's letters would have understood.

Adoption as a son under Roman law meant something very specific. It meant that you had the right to the name and the citizenship of the person who adopted you. You had the right to inherit that person's property. The adopted son had the same rights and privileges as a naturally born son.

Under Roman law these were rights and privileges that were not granted to an adopted daughter. And so that is why Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks very specifically of our adoption in terms of "adoption as sons."

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Because we have been adopted in this way by God, both male and female, because we have been adopted as *sons* of God positionally and legally, we have tremendous rights and privileges in Christ. We are truly seated in the heavenlies in Christ. That is the place from which these great rights and privileges emanate. And so as we continue in our next broadcast, we are going to explore further this tremendous truth of our adoption as sons of God, and the great inheritance that is ours in Christ.

About the Broadcast

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