

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Adopted Sons in a Fallen World" (Colossians 3:1-4, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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Today we are continuing our study of the great statement of the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we find at the beginning of the third chapter of the book of Colossians. As always, I hope that if you are able to do so you will turn to this passage with me, Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one. The Apostle Paul writes these words to the church at Colossae:

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. (Colossians 3:1-4)

During this phase of our study of this tremendous commandment from God, given to us through the Apostle Paul, we have been focusing on the great fact that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is given what the Scriptures call "adoption as sons." We are told in the New Testament that every believer, everyone who is regenerated by the Holy Spirit of God, is given that position. We have seen, in fact, that God the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of adoption."

We have seen that because God has brought us into this new position in His sight, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have new privileges and new responsibilities. Our position as the adopted sons of God also involves new relationships. In previous messages we have seen that our new position as adopted sons of God gives us a new relationship of privilege, a relationship of intimate fellowship and communication,

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with all three persons of the Trinity.

And in more recent messages, we have been focusing on the fact that the adopted sons of God also have new relationships with other people, both believers in Christ and unbelievers. The keynote of our new relationship with our fellow believers in Christ is that we are, as the Bible frequently puts it, "brethren." The adopted sons of God are all one body in Christ, we are all brothers in Christ.

We have also seen that the Scriptures are very specific in using the terms "son" and "brother" to describe this new relationship because it is a relationship that is described in the New Testament in terms of the law of adoption as it existed in the Roman Empire at that time. An adopted son had privileges and responsibilities that an adopted daughter did not have under Roman law.

And so the Apostle Paul, and the other New Testament writers, are very particular to describe the relationship that we all now have with God the Father, through Christ, and in the Holy Spirit, as a relationship of adopted *sons*. Under Roman law, an adopted son had the same privileges as a naturally born son. A father had the same responsibilities for the care of an adopted son as he had for a naturally born son.

Likewise, an adopted son carried the family name of the adopted father. And so, the conduct of that adopted son would be just as much of a reflection on the family name as the conduct of a naturally born son.

And so this is the nature of the great truth that we are considering at the present

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time. We have the family name of Christ. We have a new relationship with all other believers in Christ. We also saw in our last message that the adopted sons of God have a new relationship, or perhaps more accurately we should say a new non-relationship, spiritually speaking, with unbelievers.

We saw that the keynote of those new relationships with believers and unbelievers can be summed up in one word, and that word is *separation*. Separation unto God, and separation, spiritually speaking, from the world. This does not mean that we are to become hermits, or enter into some kind of monastic existence, or have absolutely nothing to do with the world.

We live in this world, just as Jesus lived in this world when He was on this earth. But the writer to the Hebrews tells us that while our Lord Jesus was on this earth, this was the pattern of His life – Hebrews chapter 7, verse 26. The writer tells us that when Jesus was on this earth He was, as He now is, "holy, harmless [or more literally in the original language, free from all guilt], undefiled, separate from sinners..."

The pattern of the life that was lived by the Lord Jesus Christ while He was in this world is now the pattern of the life that we are to seek to live in this world. As we saw in our last message, the Apostle John says in First John chapter 3, verse two, that

...now we are the children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He [Jesus] is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him [in Jesus] purifies himself, just as He [Jesus] is pure.

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How Must the Adopted Sons of God Live In This Present World?

And so today, we turn to face the question: How are we to do that? How must the adopted sons of God live in this present world? How are we to fulfill the command that we find in First Peter chapter 1, at verse 14 –

... as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy"?

How must be adopted sons of God live out the commandment that we find in Second Corinthians chapter 7, at verse one, where we are told,

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God"?

"Perfecting holiness" means literally, "making holiness your goal" – making separation from sin your objective in life. How is the adopted son of God to do this? Let me submit to you that the answer is fourfold. First of all, we must live in view of the *destiny* God has ordained for us. Secondly, we must live in obedience to the *boundary* God has drawn for us. Thirdly, we must live in consciousness of the *dwelling place* God has taken up within us. And fourthly, we must live in the light of the *promise* God has given us. So let us take up each one of these four principles in turn.

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The Destiny God Has Ordained for Us

First of all, we must live in view of the destiny God has ordained for us as His adopted sons. We read this in Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 29. Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 29:

For whom He [God] foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.
(Romans 8:29-30)

This is our destiny as the adopted sons of God. God has predestined His adopted sons to be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son. God is doing this so that the Lord Jesus Christ may be the firstborn among many brethren. And so God has, from before the foundation of the world as we read in Ephesians chapter 1, predestined a people to be His adopted sons, and the brethren of His only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear friends, we as Christians must live our lives in view of that destiny. God has justified us in Christ. He has declared us not guilty before His judgment bar, not on the basis of any righteousness of our own, but because of the righteousness of His only begotten Son. And Romans chapter 8 verse 30 says that those whom He has justified, "these He also glorified."

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This is the same thing that we find in Colossians chapter 3, verse four: "When Christ who is our life appears, you also will appear with Him in glory." Our future glory with Christ is so much of an already-accomplished fact in the mind and plan of God, that Romans chapter 8 verse 30 speaks of it in the past tense, as something that has already taken place. And so we are told, in Romans chapter 12, verse two,

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing [literally the renovation] of your mind, that you may prove [in other words that you may demonstrate the genuineness of that which] is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

When the Apostle Paul says, "do not be conformed to this world," he is saying that as the adopted sons of God we are not to put on an outward appearance of worldliness, an outward appearance of conformity to and fellowship with the fallen sons of Adam, which is in conflict with the fact that we have been raised with Christ. Don't live a lie, the Holy Spirit is saying through the Apostle Paul. Live in view of the destiny that God has ordained for you. That is principle number one.

The Boundary God Has Drawn For Us

Principle number two is that we as the adopted sons of God must live in obedience to the boundary that God has placed around us. What is that boundary? We find that boundary very clearly stated for us in Second Corinthians chapter 6, beginning at verse 14. Turn there with me if you are able, Second Corinthians chapter 6, beginning at verse 14:

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Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Corinthians 6:14-16a)

"Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers." In the Old Testament, in Deuteronomy chapter 22, the children of Israel were told not to join two different kinds of livestock together in a yoke to plow a field or to do other labor. The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul is telling us in Second Corinthians chapter 6 that we are not to join together in common spiritual enterprise with those who are not of the same nature as we are.

We see this so many times in the church today. We see so many in the nominally evangelical church today making common spiritual cause with those who are not believers in Christ. God says that this is dishonoring to Him. God the Holy Spirit sets before us a very clear dividing line in these verses – a very clear boundary that we are commanded not to cross. Notice what is said in these verses.

"What fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness?" The word for "fellowship" in this verse has to do specifically with spiritual partnership. God is saying through the Apostle Paul that the righteous adopted sons of God can have no spiritual partnership with the lawless sons of Adam.

And, God the Holy Spirit says, "What communion has light with darkness?" The

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word for "communion" in this verse states the fact that there can be no mutual Association in spiritual things between believers and unbelievers, because the one group has nothing to contribute to the other. There can be no communion between the two. Sinful man may think that there can be such communion, but God says unequivocally that there cannot be. He says that it is dishonoring to Him.

And then the Holy Spirit through Paul goes on to ask, "What accord has Christ with Belial?" "Belial" is a name for Satan. It means "the worthless one." God says that there can be no accord between those who are of Christ and those who are of Satan, the worthless one. And dear friends, all human beings are either of Christ or of Satan. There is no middle ground. There is no third camp. There can be no "accord" between the two.

The Greek word that is translated "accord" in this verse is the word from which we get our English word "symphony." It means that there can be no harmony, there can be no unified voice, between the two. And in the Greek of New Testament times, this word was used to speak of two people who championed the same view of things, people who came to terms with one another, people who made a treaty to stop being in opposition with one another and work together, as in a political treaty.

God the Holy Spirit is telling us: Make no spiritual peace treaties with those who are not in Christ. Do not think that you can champion the same things. Do not think that the enemy of your enemy is your friend. So many in the church today want to think that we can make common cause with unbelievers on spiritual issues because

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we seem to agree on certain points. We seem to agree that abortion is wrong, we seem to agree that homosexual relationships are wrong. We seem to agree on many other such things.

But to enter into common enterprise with such people who are not believers in Christ, on issues such as these which are at their core spiritual issues, is something that God forbids. He declares that there can be no accord between Christ and Belial. And this passage goes on to underscore the point once again by telling us that there can be no part or share between belief and unbelief.

And finally, Second Corinthians chapter 6 goes on to tell us that there can be no agreement between the temple of God and idols. No agreement. The force of the original Greek is that there can be no joining together, no mixing, no combining, no amalgamation, no incorporation, no assimilation, between the true dwelling place of God and the dwelling place of idols.

Dear friends, here we have the same injunction over and over and over again. God has not been unclear. There is no basis in His sight for making common cause spiritually with the unbelieving world. Let us not pretend for one moment that there is.

To make such common cause is to call God a liar when He says that these things are evil in His sight. To make such common cause is to bring on spiritual destruction. Look at the list of things that we are told this brings on – darkness, false peace with Satan, unbelief, idolatry. When Christians do not live lives of spiritual separation

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from the world they bring these things into their lives, and into their families, and into the church, and Christian institutions.

They assimilate false religion into the true, just as Israel did in the Old Testament. Eventually things became so evil in the nation of Israel that the nation and its religious rulers permitted the putting up of booths in the temple for the conduct of pagan ritual prostitution. Disobeying God's command of separation brought the nation of Israel to that kind of a terrible low point spiritually.

The Dwelling Place God Has Taken Within Us

And dear friends, there is much of the same thing in principle happening within the nominally evangelical church today. There is widespread spiritual prostitution in the church today. And I submit to you that this is an even more serious matter for the individual Christian today than it was even for ancient Israel.

That is because of what we find in Second Corinthians chapter 6, verse 16. Notice once again the question:

And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore, "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord

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Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:16-18)

Under the Old Covenant, there was a physical tabernacle and later the physical temple. God dwelled with Israel in the tabernacle. God condescended to come and dwell in the land, among the people, in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and later the temple. The people were to be holy, and they were to keep the land of Israel holy, because God had come to dwell among them. That was the Old Covenant picture.

But under the New Covenant, the picture has changed. The picture has become much more personal. "You," the Apostle Paul declares – you, the adopted son of God – "you are the temple of the living God."

Dear friends, as adopted sons of God we must live in continual consciousness of the dwelling place God has taken up within us. First Corinthians chapter 3, verse 16: "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" First Corinthians chapter 6, verse 19: "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

In light of these things it is clear that we must live in spiritual separation from unbelievers. We must live in view of the destiny of conformity to the image of Christ that God has ordained for us. We must live in obedience to the boundary of spiritual separation that God has drawn for us. And we must live in consciousness of the dwelling place that God has taken up within us.

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And so also, we must live lives of separation in view of the promise that God has given us. And it is that promise, the Lord willing, that great and glorious promise to the adopted sons of God, that will be the theme and the focus of our next message.

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