

# Adopted

Ephesians 1:5, 20b-23

June 19, 2016



In honor of Father's Day, I'd like to begin my message with a special video clip. His name is Gru and he decides to become a dad by adopting 3 little girls... Despicable Me is a movie that teaches us that Gru was not a perfect dad. In fact, his motives were questionable early on but his heart is quickly changed. *Here is the moral of the story:* If there is hope for a villain like Gru, there's hope for any of us as fathers!

This morning, we're going to celebrate the one father who is truly perfect, our Heavenly Father. Today we rejoice in the fact that, through Jesus Christ, we are adopted into His family.

1. God predestined us for adoption. Ephesians 1:5 says, [In love] "he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Last week during our Sunday School hour we heard from 4 different families in our church who've recently adopted children. The common thread in all these adoption stories is the initiative that the parents took. None of these kids chose their adoptive parent or contacted their parent. The kids had nothing to do with it. It was all planned out, paid for, and made to happen because of the parents' decision.

Here's the connection: God's predestined plan before the creation of the world was to adopt us into His family. Adoption is God's beautiful plan and purpose for mankind. His desire is that we become his sons and daughters. He planned it out, He paid for it through Jesus, and He made it happen by His own will and decision. This was God's plan for the Ephesian believers 2,000 years ago and it is still his plan for Christ followers today right here in Bemidji.

2. God adopted us to sonship and changed everything! Let's look at Ephesians 1:5 again, [In love] "he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." "Adoption to sonship" may sound a little strange to the women out there. I mean, I know that today is Father's Day and all, but is this message just for men? No. Paul's message to the Ephesian believers was for men and women. He uses this phrase "adoption to sonship" because it was a particular legal term in his day. We'll come back to this in a few minutes.

This adoption to sonship is an amazing contrast with what we will find just one chapter later. The ESV translates Ephesians 2:1-3, "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 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**—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."

What an amazing thing that God choose in advance that He would adopt children who He knew in advance would be disobedient and under His wrath. His grace is amazing! What an incredible turn of events. Our adoption through Christ is a key turning point in our lives. My name is Jerry Johnson. My last name comes from some distant relative who was the "son of John" or "John's son." But now, through Christ, "John's son" becomes "God's son." Our adoption changed everything: our name, our identity, our inheritance, and our opportunities. This change was prompted by love.

3. God adopted us in love. Let's look at Ephesians 1:5 one more time, [In love] "he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." You may have already noticed that the phrase "In love" is stranded at the end of v. 4 but it begins the sentence that we read in v. 5. We should recognize that

the verse divisions we find in any of our Bible translations are not inspired by God; they are simply a way for us to navigate through the text together.<sup>1</sup>

There is some debate among scholars as to whether “in love” was intended to be the concluding thought of v. 4. Then, it would be translated as something like “to be holy and blameless in his sight in love.” And, v. 5 would simply begin “He predestined us...” Many translations, including the NIV, make “In love” the beginning of the sentence for v. 5. So we read, “In love He predestined us for adoption.” Regardless of what we decide in this grammatical debate, certainly no translation is suggesting that we were adopted in hate or disdain or anything less than love. Theologically speaking, our Heavenly Father’s love is clearly demonstrated in His adoption of us. Further, v. 5 tells us that our adoption was in accordance with God’s “pleasure and will.” Our adoption brings God great joy and it is something He desires, not something He was somehow forced into. Our adoption into God’s family is on purpose and something He delighted in. We can know this with certainty. Because it was in love...

4. Our adoption into God’s family has gracious benefits. But before we discuss the details of these benefits, let’s make sure we know who is eligible to get them. I mentioned earlier that we would come back to this phrase “adoption to sonship.” It begs the question, “Does this adoption only apply to men?” Paul uses the word “υιοθεσίαν” with a specific intent. This was a legal technical term used in his surrounding culture for the adoption of children. Its focus was on the legal aspect, not the gender aspect, as the primary semantic component.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, in Christ, men AND women are adopted into God’s family with “the full legal standing of an adopted male heir in Roman culture.”<sup>3</sup> Now, on to the benefits that male and female Christ followers can enjoy together.

4a. Our adoption into God’s family involves a shared inheritance. In two previous sermons, we spent quite a bit of time already talking about inheritance. In Ephesians 1:14 we talked about the Holy Spirit being a deposit who guarantees our inheritance. In Ephesians 1:18 we learned about God having His inheritance in us. But, there is still more to understand; that’s how great this inheritance is! First of all, adopted kids get all the same rights and benefits as the natural born children. Back when Paul wrote the book of Ephesians, “Adoption was common among the Greeks and Romans, who granted the adopted son all the privileges of a natural son, including inheritance rights.”<sup>4</sup> There is nothing like a pre-nuptial agreement; adopted kids have the full rights/privileges of natural born kids.

Now, watch this: Christians are God’s adopted [children] by grace; Christ is God’s Son by nature.”<sup>5</sup> But, here’s the amazing thing, Jesus shares the inheritance with us! Romans 8:14-17 says it this way, “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are<sup>6</sup> God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”

Abba is the Aramaic word for “father.” It’s an expression of “an especially close relationship to God.”<sup>7</sup> When we as Christians talk about a “personal relationship with



<sup>1</sup> Research Robert Stephanus who was the first to number the verses within each chapter in the 1500s.

<sup>2</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 1024). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>3</sup> NIV Study Bible note p. 1985.

<sup>4</sup> NIV Study Bible notes p. 1902.

<sup>5</sup> NIV Study Bible notes p. 1902.

<sup>6</sup> Currently, right now!

<sup>7</sup> NIV Study Bible notes p. 1902.

God,” this idea of Abba Father is what we’re talking about. It is helpful if we think of it in terms of “daddy” or “papa.”

God is our Abba Father.

Another benefit we enjoy through adoption involves a king.

4b. Our adoption into God’s family involves a shared kingdom. Two weeks ago, I mentioned that I wanted to come back to Ephesians 1:20-23. The reason for this is tied directly to this idea of adoption and our inheritance. Ephesians 1:20-21 tells us that, God’s power, “...raised Christ from the dead AND seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.”

Raising Christ from the dead proclaimed “He lives!”; seating Christ in the heavenly realms proclaimed “He reigns!”<sup>8</sup> The idea of someone being seated sounds pretty harmless to the naïve spectator. But, what we are talking about here is the enthronement of a king! Psalm 110:1 prophesies about our Messiah King, “...Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” So the picture here is of Jesus sitting down with His feet propped up on His enemies. Ephesians 1:22 says, “God placed all things under his feet.” And so, God exerted His power in seating Jesus at his right hand in heaven. Now, watch this closely, Ephesians 2:6 says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.” **Where do the adopted kids sit?** Through our union with Christ, we are seated in the heavenly realms with Jesus. Jesus literally saved us... a REALLY good seat! Our inheritance is incredible. We are co-heirs with King of Kings!

Ephesians 1:22-23 goes on to say, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.” It says that Jesus was appointed as head over everything FOR the church. So again we see God’s grace toward us in using Christ’s position FOR the church’s benefit. We are His body with the reigning Christ as our head.

V. 23 says we are also filled up by Him. This idea of the “fullness of Christ” is a picture of the body of Christ being a container that is filled up with Christ.<sup>9,10</sup> Later on in Ephesians 3:19 we find Paul on his knees again, asking the Heavenly Father that they, “...may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” And this brings us full circle to our sermon focus way back on May 22. All of our spiritual blessings are in Christ, through Christ, under Christ, and even filled up with Christ. This is all part of our adoption: we are raised with Christ to new life, seated with Christ in the heavenlies, under Christ’s headship, and filled up with the fullness of Christ. Our spiritual blessings in Christ involve a shared inheritance and a shared kingdom. We share these benefits because of our adoption into God’s family.

5. Our adoption into God’s family has implications for Christian living. Because we have been adopted into God’s family, we develop a heart for adoption. Like most kids, we want to be like our dad. Our Heavenly Father is an adopter. He is a father to the fatherless. He sets the lonely in families. He looks after orphans and widows in their distress.<sup>11</sup> This is what our Heavenly Father is like. So, it shouldn’t surprise us to find adoption and foster care ministries in the church. It’s built into our spiritual DNA. This doesn’t mean that everyone has to go out and begin offering official foster care in their home. Nor are we all obligated to adopt a child. But, some of us certainly will. And, all of us will very likely find ourselves being a pseudo dad or mom. A non-legal adoptive grandparent, aunt, or uncle. When Christ followers see opportunities for mentoring

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<sup>8</sup> M. J. Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 85, referenced by O’Brien in *The Letter to the Ephesians*, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> See Stott pp. 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> “It is the church which is filled or completed by Christ rather than that which fills or completes him.” O’Brien p. 150.

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 68:5-6

others, we call it discipleship, we tend to jump in quickly and often. Let me show you a few examples that flow right along with this idea of adoption:

1. Some of us adopt through child sponsorship.
2. Some of us adopt a grandparent, an older person, a neighbor, or a single person without much family around. We tend to think of adopting someone younger or adopting a child. But, adoption can also work where the younger person adopts the older.
3. Some of us adopt a college student or someone else like that to live in our spare bedroom or basement.
4. Some of us adopt a little brother or sister. We become a big sister or big brother in Christ. We may do this through youth group, kids ministry, the nursery, Vacation Bible School, summer camp, the choir, or a worship team.
5. Some of us adopt an adoptive family. We have a ministry in our church right now that is focusing on providing meals for families who are doing foster care. Adoption can mean helping with respite care and support for other families who have adopted a child.
6. Some of us adopt a mentor or mentee. We disciple someone 1 to 1. Paul adopted Timothy: 1 Tim. 1:2 is written, "To Timothy my true son in the faith..." Paul took Timothy under his wing, coached him, advised him, and disciple him as a big brother in the Lord.

Being adopted by the same dad makes us bros./sisters in Christ. Adoption is close to the heart of God. May it be close to ours as well!

This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji  
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