

"Adopted Kids"

When a person becomes a Christian it changes his or her relationship with God. The New Testament has a number of ways to describe this change. One way is to say that ***we are adopted into God's family.***

The Scripture reading today from Galatians chapter 4 describes this. When the time was right in God's plan, God sent His Son into the world that we might be adopted into the family of God. Evangelist C.M. Ward put it well: "Every real Christian is adopted. No one comes into this world a Christian. We do not adopt ourselves. We are adopted. Someone who wants us reaches out towards us. There is no other way."

Let's think of what this means when the Bible uses this imagery of adoption, and how we are adopted into God's family. A place to start is to recognize that when adoption takes place, ***something happened to create a need for adoption.*** Maybe the child's natural parents died, or the mother is a single woman who decides not to keep the child. In some cases, the legal system has determined that a parent, or parents, are incapable of performing parental functions, or represent a danger to the child.

One of the most frightening experiences of life is for a child to be without parents. Psychologists talk of a child's natural fear of abandonment. We may hear in the news where parents of a child or children have been killed, or died, leaving children behind. It's hard to imagine how devastating and traumatic that must be. So, where we have adoption, we have something outside of the normal biological family arrangement.

This carries over to the spiritual realm. God's original intention was that we have a close and intimate relationship with our Creator – our heavenly Father. But that relationship is broken due to *sin* – our *sins*. We are *spiritual orphans* – cut off and separated from our heavenly Father, our Creator.

But if there is trauma in our being spiritual orphans, there is joy because ***somebody wants us!*** God wants to adopt us into His family! A few years ago Nancy and I attended the memorial service of a relative. After the service I had a conversation with the pastor who conducted the service. He was telling me about his new grandson. His son and daughter-in-law had adopted a baby, and the pastor related how it was working out so well for them. And as he was talking, this pastor was beaming with pride as a granddad – just as much as if the grandson had been his son's biological child.

God longs to adopt us into His family! That "adoption process" was in the heart of the Father ever since we humans cut ourselves off from God by our sins. Ephesians 1:4-5 says, "Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure." (New Living Translation). Our papers for adoption were drawn up the day God sent His Son Jesus into the world.

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive *adoption* as children” (Galatians 4:4-5). *The day we turn from our sins and trust Christ as our Savior is the day we get our adoption papers!*

What we're really talking about here is "grace". We don't enter God's family because we deserve it, or because of something good we've done, but because of the graciousness of God in accepting us into His family. I read about a couple who applied to adopt a child. The day came when a child was available. They were called into the agency. Once there, a social worker said to them: "We need to tell you, this baby really isn't a pretty child, and you may be disappointed. Maybe you ought to discuss whether you want to go ahead with the adoption." The couple went out of the room and talked, and when they came back into the room they said this, "We've decided that we're not very pretty or special either, so we'd love to have this child as our own."

Well, you and I aren't very "pretty" spiritually. We sin. We sometimes say and do foolish things. We disappoint God time and again. But God wants us anyway in His family even though we don't deserve it. This is "grace"! The Gaithers wrote a song that expresses this reality. The song is called *The Family of God*. It includes these words:

"From the door of an orph'nage to the house of the King,
No longer an outcast, a new song I sing.
From rags unto riches, from the weak to the strong,
I'm not worthy to be here, but praise God I belong.

Then the chorus begins, "I'm so glad I'm a part of the family of God....."!

When a child is adopted, it changes that child's life in a big way! This is also true when we're adopted into God's family. Let's look at some of the ways our life changes once we put our faith in Christ and are adopted into God's family.

For one thing, it gives us a special, close relationship with God. Some people believe in God, but not the kind of God with whom we can have a relationship. Their God is more like a cosmic force, an impersonal supernatural being. But real Christians...God's adopted kids....know that's not true! Look at Galatians 4:6 "And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our heart, crying, 'Abba! Father!'" That word "Abba" is an Aramaic word. It's hard to translate into English. It's a term of endearment. Perhaps the closest we can come to catching the meaning of the word "Abba" is "Daddy", or "My daddy". Now to say we can call God "Daddy" would have been shocking to Jews in Jesus' time, some of whom wouldn't even speak or write the name of God. But that's how intimate a relationship with our Creator we can have when we are God's adopted sons and daughters!

Another way our life changes when we are adopted into God's family by receiving Christ is this: It can give us a great boost in healthy self-esteem. I'm a child of God! I'm in God's family! I am loved and wanted!

Having a healthy sense of self-worth is so important in life! Many studies document the fact that poor self-esteem is at the root of such things as alcoholism, drug addiction, marriage and family discord, a critical attitude, underachievement, sexual promiscuity, etc.

Now some people try to promote self-esteem from a purely secular approach, leaving God out of the picture. I once saw a talk show on TV where some women were discussing how they were getting along without a man and without marriage! One of the ladies got my attention. She exuded a boastful self-confidence. She talked about how successful she was in business, her wealth, the number of friends she had. This attractive woman conveyed the attitude, "Look at *me*, and what I've made of myself!" But you know what? If our self-worth is rooted in just *what we accomplish, or what we possess*, we're on shaky ground! What if we're not good looking? What if we haven't made it in business or the job market? What if we don't have a lot of money? What if we have serious moral flaws? But the Bible says our sense of worth and value is *rooted in God*, and *in God loving us and welcoming us* into His family as sons and daughters through Christ!

Someone has captured this truth this way,

"I may be young; I may be old, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be educated; I may be unlettered, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be black; I may be white, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be rich; I may be poor, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be married; I may be divorced, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be successful; I may be a failure, but I am somebody, for I am God's child.
I may be a sinner; I may be a saint, but I am somebody, for Jesus is my Savior.
I am God's child."

Being adopted into God's family by putting our faith in Christ as Savior changes us, and gives us a new healthy self-esteem as a son or daughter of the living God!

At least one other thing happens through our being adopted into God's family: ***We receive our inheritance.*** We're only adopted kids, but we have every legal right to our heavenly Father's inheritance! Galatians 4:7 tells us, "So you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God"

We know what an inheritance is, right? Maybe we inherited money or property from a parent, or relative. Maybe we have stated in our will that our children, or someone else, or some church or charity, gets our inheritance or part of our bequest.

So what do we inherit from our Father in heaven? Our final inheritance is heaven and eternal life. Titus 3:7 says, "Having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs, having the hope of eternal life." Elsewhere the Bible tells us that our inheritance, stored up in heaven, does not fade or perish. You're a child of God? You've got a life with God....in this fabulous realm called heaven....that lasts forever! It doesn't get much better than that!

But not only do we have the promise of heaven, out there in the future. We can also get a little taste of our inheritance already! We are given the Holy Spirit as a “down payment” or preview of our full inheritance to come!

Romans 8:23 says this: “We ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.” Now this verse is a bit difficult to understand, but it is saying this: We are waiting and longing for our final inheritance – life in heaven, with a new body. But God gives us His Spirit (the Holy Spirit) to live in us now as a little taste of the joy and peace and goodness and love of heaven to come! Isn’t that awesome!

In one church I served, soon after I went to that congregation, a husband and wife couple started to attend. They had been married a number of years and had no children. Their desire to adopt took them to Russia! They traveled to Russia and adopted 2 babies from an orphanage - boys - unrelated, but both about the same age. It was thrilling to hear of their trip, and the obstacles they ran into. Needless to say, these babies changed their life and routine! It was a joy to watch those babies grow up and be involved in the church. Just recently they graduated from college. Think of the riches of inheritance for these 2 young men. Who knows what life would have held for them if they had stayed in that orphanage in Russia. But they were brought to the United States, into a family where they were loved, able to enjoy the riches of our country and all that it offers! It was just beautiful to see!

It’s also beautiful to see what adoption into God’s family can mean for us! That we can be God’s sons and daughter in Christ! The riches of *our inheritance* that Christ has made possible!

*Harry L. Kaufhold, Jr.
Community United Methodist Church
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