

## THE ADOPTION OF SONS

In ancient Rome, infanticide was an accepted practice. Parents would leave their unwanted newborn children exposed to the elements so that they would perish. The church of Jesus Christ forbade it, and finally the Christian emperors Constantine the Great and Valentinian made it illegal. There was in ancient Rome a practice of adoption, but the Romans practiced it, not because of any compassion for children without parents, but because of an interest in preserving a family name, or a family fortune. In the Roman practice of adoption, the one adopted took on the name of his new family, and he became an heir of the estate. In United States today, as in ancient Rome, there is both infanticide and adoption. According to the Guttmacher Institute, there were in the Year of Our Lord Two-thousand Twenty nearly one-million legal induced abortions in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, there are around four-hundred thousand children in foster care. Of that number, more than one-hundred thousand wait for adoption. According to some sources, around two-million couples wait to adopt a child. Concerning foster care, the South Carolina Bar states:

Foster care is a temporary arrangement in which adults care for children and youth who are not able to live with their biological parents. When birth parents are unable, unwilling, or unfit to care for a child, foster care provides a safe place for the child to be placed. Foster care is not the same as adoption, and the goal of the foster care system is usually to reunite the child with the birth family. Whereas foster care is temporary, adoption is permanent.

Daniel Webster defined *adoption* as *the act or process of establishing a legal relationship between a child and a parent other than the child's biological parent, thereby entrusting the designated adult with responsibility for raising the child*. Adoption is an occasion of great joy, for both child and parent. What is true of natural adoption, is true of spiritual adoption. People come into this world in a state of sin and death, and the devil is their father. God adopts the Christian, so that the Christian takes on the name of God, and becomes His son and heir. This is cause for great joy for God, and for His children.

After God redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt, He brought them to Mount Sinai where He made a covenant with them. He told Moses to say to them:

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. (Exodus 19:4–6)

The Israelites agreed to God's terms, and said, "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do." (Exodus 19:8) Then the Lord manifested Himself on the mountain in thunder and lightning, fire and smoke, and earthquake, so that the people greatly feared Him. Moses said to them, "Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not." (Exodus 20:20) God meant the people no harm, but He did mean to impress upon them the harm He would do to them if they broke covenant with Him. Anyone who broke God's law deserved to die. To symbolize this, Moses slaughtered some oxen, and sprinkled their blood on the altar, and on the people.

God's law was for the sanctification of His people; it was to make them holy. God's people swore to keep His law, but, because they were sinners, they were powerless to do so. They continually failed.

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel and Judah, the people were very wicked. God said to them:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. (Isaiah 1:11–15)

The people continually broke God's moral law while keeping His ceremonial law. They sinned, but they offered the sacrifices required to cover their sins. Yet, God did not accept their offerings because they gave them hypocritically. They gave them with impenitent hearts. They gave them, not because they were sorry for their sins, but because they feared punishment. They were unclean, and their righteousness was like a polluted garment. (Isaiah 64:6) God did not accept their sacrifices, and did not forgive their sins.

Then God said them:

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it. (Isaiah 1:18–20)

God asked His people to be reasonable concerning a matter that was not difficult. If they repented of their sins, and obeyed, then God would forgive their sins, and bless them; if they would not repent, then God would not forgive them, and would curse them. If they repented, then their soiled garments would be washed clean. The people would not repent, however, but would continue in their rebellion and hypocrisy; so, they would have to die. God sent heathen armies to conquer them and to carry them away into exile.

God would punish the people for their sins, and only then would the people repent. Because they would repent, God, always gracious, would redeem and restore them. Isaiah said to them:

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified. (Isaiah 61:1–3)

God put His Spirit upon the prophet, and anointed him to announce good news to the meek, to bind up broken hearts, to proclaim liberty to those in captivity. Those that mourned their punishment, and their sin, God would comfort. They had been dressed in polluted garments, but God would dress them in new clothes. To them that

put ashes of patients on their heads God would give beauty. For them that mourned God would put on their heads the oil of joy. To them that were heavy-hearted God would give a garment of praise. Then they would flourish in righteousness like great trees planted by God for His own glory.

Then the people of God would say:

I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels. For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. (Isaiah 61:10, 11)

The people would be full of joy because God would remove their filthy and ugly rags of sin, and dress them in clean and beautiful clothes of righteousness. They would be dressed as a bridegroom and as a bride on their wedding day. They would be righteous, not because of any righteousness in themselves, but because God forgave their sins when they repented of them. Just as surely as the earth produces buds in their season, and just as surely as what is planted in a garden springs to life, so God would renew His people after the winter of their chastisement. God would not perform this in secret, but would perform it before all the nations of the world.

Then the prophet said:

For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name. Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God. Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married. For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee. (Isaiah 62:1-5)

For the sake of the great city of Jerusalem, which the Babylonians destroyed when they conquered the kingdom of Judah, the prophet would not be silent, but would be faithful to prophesy to the people until such time as they should repent of their sins and obey the law of God. Then they would be like a beacon of light shining out to the nations, and all the nations would see their glory. God would give them a new name, one appropriate to their standing before God. They would be God's crowning achievement. When the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem, and carried the people away into exile, the nations called the Israelites Forsaken, and their land Desolate. They were humiliated, yet, God would exalt them and give them a name fitting their exalted status. They would be called My Delight, and their land would be called Married, because the people would once again be joined to their homeland as a young man marries a virgin; and God will rejoice over them as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

The prophecy was fulfilled in the return of the Jews from exile to their land, but it had its ultimate fulfillment in the coming of the Christ. Jesus, in the beginning of His earthly ministry, went to a synagogue, and read out to the congregation from the book of Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:18, 19)

Then He said, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.” (Luke 4:21) The Christ came to deliver people from their bondage to sin and death, and to give them new life, and new identities.

Saint John began his gospel with these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. (John 1:1–5)

The Word existed at the beginning of the world. He was with God, and also was God. He was not made, but rather made all things, and nothing was made that He did not make. He was life itself, and His life would be a light for mankind. When He came into the world, He shone His light on the sin and ignorance of men, but men, because of their sin and ignorance did not receive His light.

Then John wrote:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. (John 1:6–8)

God sent John the Baptist, a prophet, to bear witness that Jesus is the Light of the world, so that all men might believe in Jesus. John did bear witness to the Light. When John baptized Jesus, He saw the Spirit of God descend upon Jesus like a dove, and he heard a voice from heaven say, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17) So John told the people who Jesus was.

Then John wrote:

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1:9–13)

The Word made the world, and came into the world, and was the light of the world; yet, the world did not recognize Him. He came to His own people, God’s people, the Isralites, who had been expecting Him; yet, they did not receive Him. Some did receive Him; however; they did believe in Him. To them He gave the authority to become children of God. They were begotten as children of God, not by being descendents of Abraham, not by any fleshly impulse, and not by any man’s choice. They were begotten as children of God by God.

John wrote further:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the

only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him. (John 1:14–18)

The eternal Word of God, who made all things, including mankind, became a man, and lived among men, and men beheld His glory, the glory of the only-begotten Son of God. Men are in ignorance and sin, but the Son of God came into the world to impart to men grace and truth, to show them the way of salvation. The ceremonial law was a shadow, the Son of God the reality. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” (John 14:6) He is the One concerning whom John the Baptist bore witness. Those who believe in Jesus have the fullness of His grace; not grace given them in small portions, but grace lavished upon them. Moses gave God’s law to the people, but they, because they were sinners, could not keep it. The law could tell the people what to do, but it could not empower them to do it. The law prescribed animal sacrifices to atone for men’s sins, but the blood of animals cannot really atone for sins. The Son of God came into the world not only to atone for the failure of men to keep the law of God, but also to empower men to keep it. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He somewhat hid Himself, and said:

The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Exodus 34:6, 7)

Before the Son of God came into the world, no man had ever seen the person of God. The only-begotten Son of God has revealed God, so that anyone who has seen Him, has seen God. Jesus Christ is the full revelation of God Himself, and of His grace and truth.

Saint Paul explained to the Galatians:

But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (Galatians 3:23–25)

Faith did not originate with the coming of Christ. Men have always been righteous before God by faith, and this is exemplified in Abraham. Yet, saving faith must be directed toward the Savior. Before Christ came, the people of God were kept in ward by the law until He, the ultimate object of faith, should come. The law was a tutor from which God’s people should have learned that they are too sinful to keep God’s law, and so in need of a Savior. Since Christ has come, this relationship of the people of God to the law of God is defunct. Those who have been baptized into Christ have had their sins washed away, and have put on, like a clean, new garment, Christ, and so they stand before God as righteous.

Saint Paul wrote further:

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of

sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ. (Galatians 4:4–7)

When the time was right, God sent into the world His Son to become a man, and to live as a man. He did this in order to redeem His people who were under the law, but unable to keep the law no matter how much they might fear God's punishment. God redeemed them so that He might adopt them as His children. Because His people are His children, He has sent into the world the Spirit of His Son so that He might enter into their hearts, and gladly cry out, and Christians with Him, that God is their Father. So, Christians are not God's slaves, but His sons, and because they are His sons, they are also His heirs, heirs of the Kingdom of God, and of His Christ.

Under the dispensation of Moses, the people of God obeyed the law of God mechanically; under the dispensation of Christ, they obey the law spontaneously. Under the dispensation of Moses, the people of God related to God as servants to a master, and they served God with the fear that a servant has of his master; under the dispensation of Christ, the people of God relate to God as children to a father, and they serve God with the love that a child has for its father.

Let us understand the difficulty of those who labored under the law of Moses. Let us be glad that God sent His Son into the world so that we might become children of God. Let us obey God, not as cowering slaves, but as loving children.

Now unto the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen.