

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Adoption: 'Abba, Father' " (Colossians 3:1-4, Romans 8:14-17)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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Dear friends, at the end of our last message I said that it was my intention today, in our consideration of the great and glorious doctrine of our adoption as sons by God the Father, to move on from the discussion of the believer's new relationship with the three persons of the Godhead to a discussion of the believer's new relationship with other human beings, both believers and unbelievers, as an adopted son of God.

But before we move on, I believe that I should say more today about the believer's relationship with the persons of the Godhead, and in particular as it relates to the greatest privilege of the adopted sons of God in this present life, the privilege of coming before the throne of God the Father in prayer. The average Christian makes little use, or poor use, of the unique privilege we have, to come before our Heavenly Father with everything that is on our hearts.

As we saw in our last message, the Scriptures instruct us to come before God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. We are instructed to pray in Jesus' name. This great fact underlines once again the importance of the passage of Scripture that has been our theme passage for this series of messages, in Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one.

If you have been listening to this series of messages, the words I am about to read will be very familiar to you by now. But even if that is the case, I encourage you to open up your own copy of God's Word and follow with me as I read these very vital verses once again. Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse one:

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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.

Dear friends, as we saw in our last message, the Lord Jesus Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, interceding on your behalf. As John tells us in his first epistle, "we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). It is through the Lord Jesus Christ, through His righteousness, that we have this new, deep, and abiding relationship with God the Father.

We also saw in our last message that we have not only an Advocate, or a Paraclete, at the right hand of God the Father in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, but we also have another Paraclete, another Advocate, another Comforter, another Helper, living within us in the person of God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit indwells every believer in Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who comes and brings us to spiritual life by the work of calling us and regenerating us. It is God the Holy Spirit who brings us to "repentance toward God [the Father] and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). God the Holy Spirit takes up residence within every believer in Christ. We are, as the adopted sons of God, the temples of the Holy Spirit. We are the temples of the living God in this world in this New Covenant age.

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We read in Romans chapter 8, as we saw in our last message, that this has something very specific to do with our adoption. Scripture calls God the Holy Spirit "the Spirit of adoption." And in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 13, the Apostle Paul writes that "having believed, you [the adopted sons of God] were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory" – that is, the glory of God the Father.

What Paul is saying is this: As adopted sons of God we have the promise of an inheritance, and God the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our hearts when we are converted is the guarantee that God, without fail, will complete that inheritance when we reach Heaven.

The end goal of our adoption is the glory of God the Father, and our glorification with Him – and that glory will come to its consummation when we receive our full inheritance of the glories of the New Heavens and New Earth as the adopted sons of God for eternity.

But the Holy Spirit has a very active office in the life of each adopted son of God during this present life on earth. As we saw in our last message, in Romans chapter 8 beginning at verse 14, the Word of God declares to us that

as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself

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bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. (Romans 8:14-17)

It is by the Spirit of adoption that we cry out, "Abba, Father." The word "Abba" is a very special and significant word. It is a word that is found in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. And the significance of the apostle Paul's use of this word both here in Romans and also in a related passage in Galatians where he speaks of our adoption, has to do with the fact that he is making the point that the relationship of the adopted son of God to his Heavenly Father is meant to be a relationship of the greatest intimacy and the greatest trust.

The word "Abba" was one of the first words that would be spoken by a Hebrew infant. It is equivalent to terms such as "Papa" or "daddy" in the English language. It was a term that indicated unquestioning trust in the love and care of a parent. And the Apostle Paul couples the word "Abba" with the word "Father" to indicate two aspects of the believer's relationship with God the Father as an adopted son. The word "Abba" indicates that unquestioning trust, while the word "Father" indicates an intelligent understanding of the relationship, an intelligent understanding of the nature of the Father and of your position of privilege as His adopted son. The picture that we have in these two words is that of a trusting child climbing up into the lap of a loving father to tell him what is on his heart.

Dear friend, that is your enormous privilege if you are a believer on the Lord Jesus Christ. You can speak to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ and in the

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Holy Spirit on the most intimate and personal terms.

The great actor Orson Welles was once asked if he ever prayed. Orson Welles replied that he did not pray, because, he said, "I don't want to bore God." But dear friend, those were the words of an unbeliever. But that must never be the attitude of the child of God. That must never be how we think of the tremendous privilege of prayer. And that must never be how we think of our Heavenly Father.

You are to come before your loving Father as a trusting child. You cannot ever possibly "bore" your Heavenly Father with anything that you would have to say. You can tell Him all that is on your heart. You can tell Him everything.

Many of the adopted sons of God miss the fact that in the great passage in Ephesians chapter 6, where we are instructed to put on "the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand," that prayer is a vital part of that armoring and that spiritual warfare. Turn with me there, if you are able, to Ephesians chapter 6 beginning at verse 14. Ephesians 6, beginning at verse 14:

Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God;

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and then notice verse 18:

praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...

This is a very emphatic statement. The words that are translated "praying always" means literally "praying in every season." Praying at every opportunity. Praying in every situation, in every state in which you find yourself, in every condition, in every event.

And notice also the words "praying... with all prayer and supplication." The idea behind these words is that through the medium of prayer, by the means of prayer, we should bring to God every need.

And so the force of this statement is that we can, and we should, and we indeed must – if we are to withstand the enemy of our souls in spiritual battle – we must be in continual prayer. We must, in every situation in which we find ourselves, in every circumstance, in every challenge, in every need, be bringing every request that has to do with everything before our Heavenly Father, because of our position of privilege to do so as His adopted sons because of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We find a very similar instruction in Philippians chapter 4 verse six. There the Apostle Paul by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells the church,

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be anxious for nothing, but [notice once again] in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

and notice the result, Philippians chapter 4 verse seven:

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Dear friends, I can tell you that it has been my own experience, even in a time when I was very near death, and the doctors in fact thought that I was going to die. Even in the midst of great uncertainty, there was a knowledge that God the Father was in full control. That knowledge, that certainty, did not come from within me. It came from God. It came from His Word.

And indeed, that knowledge is, as Paul says in this verse, a guard for the heart and mind of the adopted son of God. The word "guard" in the original language means to be protected from hostile invasion. It means to be protected from being besieged by an enemy. And that is the protection that God gives His children. It is not necessarily a matter of feelings. We may be shaking in our boots in those times of distress. We may be absolutely weak and helpless. But God will guard us. We are in His hand. He will never disown His adopted children. He will see them through to the end.

And notice also that in Ephesians chapter 6 we are told to pray always with all prayer and supplication "in the Spirit" – God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption,

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the One who dwells within us, the One who witnesses with our spirits that we are indeed the adopted sons of God. And that is because, as we come to a loving Father, as we cry out, "Abba, Father," the Holy Spirit is coming with us, and as we have seen in Romans chapter 8, the indwelling Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Trinity, is making intercession for us through our Savior, the Second Person of the Trinity, to the Father, the First Person of the Trinity.

Think of this, dear friend, get hold of this great fact: All three Persons of the great Godhead are involved in your exercise of the great privilege of prayer. And even the things that we cannot articulate, even the things that we in our flesh cannot properly present as a petition before our loving Father, even those things are clearly articulated on the most intimate possible terms before our Heavenly Father, the persons of the Godhead literally speaking with one another on our behalf as we pray. What a tremendous fact. What a tremendous privilege.

The book of Psalms is filled with examples of the exercise of this great privilege. The Psalms demonstrate to us that we can indeed, we may indeed, tell our Heavenly Father all that is on our hearts, as a trusting child comes to an earthly father to tell him everything.

We may tell our Heavenly Father the things that give us joy, the things that worry us, the things that hurt us, the things for which we are thankful, the things we need, our deepest thoughts, our deepest desires, the sins we wrestle with. We can bring all of these things to our loving Father, and know without a doubt on the authority of His

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Word that He will hear us with a heart of love and kindness.

Let me call your attention to just a few examples of this kind of outcry to a loving Father that we find on so many occasions in the Psalms. Let me mention but a handful of them to you.

In Psalm 30, David offered this prayer to God on a day of great rejoicing, when he dedicated his own house in Jerusalem:

I will extol You, O Lord, for You have lifted me up, and have not let my foes rejoice over me. O Lord my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me. O Lord, You brought my soul up from the grave; You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Sing praise to the Lord, you saints of His, and give thanks at the remembrance of His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning (Psalm 30:1-5).

David said these words when he was in danger in the land of his enemies – Psalm 34, beginning at verse one:

I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make its boast in the Lord; the humble shall hear of it and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.

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I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. They looked to Him and were radiant, and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried out, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. (Psalm 34:1-9)

David prayed these words that are recorded for us in Psalm 141, when he sought the safekeeping of the Lord when he was tempted to do evil:

Lord, I cry out to You; Make haste to me! Give ear to my voice when I cry out to You. Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice. (Psalm 141:1-2)

And David prayed these words, in Psalm 142, when he was in a cave, hiding from his enemies:

I cry out to the Lord with my voice; with my voice to the Lord I make my supplication. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then You knew my path.

In the way in which I walk they have secretly set a snare for me. Look

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on my right hand and see, for there is no one who acknowledges me; refuge has failed me; no one cares for my soul.

I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name; the righteous shall surround me, for You shall deal bountifully with me." (Psalm 142:1-7)

And David prayed these words in Psalm 55, when he was overcome by fear:

Give ear to my prayer, O God, and do not hide Yourself from my supplication. Attend to me, and hear me; I am restless in my complaint, and moan noisily, because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked;

For they bring down trouble upon me, and in wrath they hate me. My heart is severely pained within me, and the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me. So I said, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." ...

As for me, I will call upon God, and the Lord shall save me. Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice. (Psalm 55:1-6, 16-17)

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Dear friend, if you are an adopted son of God, if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for your salvation, you can pray to your Heavenly Father like this. At any time, in any place, in any situation, about anything. "Set your mind on things above," dear friend, "where Christ is" – your great Intercessor with your Father – "sitting at the right hand of God [the Father]. Set your mind on things above, and not on things on earth. For you died" – you are dead to this world, but alive in Christ – "and your life is hidden with Christ in God [the Father]" – the ultimate place of safety, both now and for eternity.

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