

04/25/10

Who Are You #3 – Rejected or Adopted? Ephesians 1:1-14

- We live in a world that loves to practice rejection...
 - there is something deep in the heart of man that seeks to elevate oneself by ridiculing, or embarrassing, or rejecting someone else...
 - and what's amazing is – that tendency begins even among children...
- many of you know that I grew up in Gary...but when I was in sixth grade, my family decided to move to Merrillville...
 - our home sold fairly quickly...even before we had located our next house...so for a several months we rented a home in the same general area where we eventually moved permanently...
 - of course I didn't know a soul as a new kid in the neighborhood, and before I had been used to running around with all the neighborhood kids in Gary playing baseball, or football, or whatever sport was in season out in our front yards...
 - so it was very strange for all of that to be gone...
 - and then one day, one of the guys whose house backed up to ours asked me if I wanted to go play baseball with some other kids from this new neighborhood...and he was a year or two younger than me – but anything to get out of the house on a summer day, so I went...
 - he took me over to this little park where several neighborhood roads came together...and then they started choosing up sides...
 - well, I was never exactly a star athlete...but I could hold my own in a sand lot baseball game...and so you start sizing up the other guys who are being chosen for the team...
 - and other than the two self-appointed captains...I was bigger than most of the kids there...so I thought – well, this will be OK...although I noticed pretty quickly that these Merrillville kids seemed a bit snooty – like they were somehow a cut above someone from Gary...
 - well, then the captains started choosing who they wanted on their team... (have you ever experienced that before?)...
 - and their first picks were of some of the other kids that were older, and that was OK...but then they start choosing smaller and smaller kids until I'm left there standing with a couple of kids that were about 5 years old...
 - and then, just to make the point that the new kid wasn't welcome...they actually picked the little kids before me...and everyone else is snickering by this point...
 - and I'm looking over at the guy who brought me whose name was Brian, saying "thanks a lot"....I think he was a bit embarrassed but not enough to do anything about it...
 - so I'm the last guy standing there, and as I recall, one captain looked at me and then said to the other captain...I guess you get stuck with him...
 - so our team batted first and the captain looked at me and said, why don't you go first, strike out, and get it over with?...and of course everyone got a pretty good laugh out of that one...
 - but that's the nature of the heart of man...let's elevate ourselves by embarrassing someone else, or ridiculing them, or rejecting them...
 - by the way, in one of those moments where God in His sense of humor chooses to unusually bless you, I hit the first pitch so far we had trouble finding the ball...

- in fact, I've gone back to that spot several times since that day and I don't believe I ever hit a baseball that far before or since...
- it was either the grace of God, or pent up anger, or a combination of both if there is such a thing...but the point is – we all know what it feels like to be rejected...
- now, I fully realize that many people here could tell stories of rejection that would make my little sandlot baseball story pale in comparison...
- in fact, our family eventually moved from that neighborhood to our permanent home in another part of Merrillville so I lost touch with that group of kids but a couple of years later the same boy who invited me to play in the first place chose to take his life in the basement of his home...
- and I always wondered if rejection and cruelty in that neighborhood had anything to do with that event...
- there are people here this morning who could tell stories of being rejected by a spouse...and even if you've moved on now, that event or period of your life has probably left a scar...
- others could tell of children who have rejected your beliefs and ridiculed what you stand for and now have practically severed the relationship...
- you may have experienced that kind of rejection at school or at work...it is a powerful force...
- that is so true that some people define themselves through that lens, or would do anything to avoid ever being in that place again...
 - so parents won't properly discipline their children because of the fear of being rejected...
 - or employees won't stand up for what is right in the workplace because they want to be one of the boys...
 - or young people won't say no to drugs or alcohol because they have to be part of the crowd...
 - or a date won't say no to physical advances because, in her mind, being rejected by a boyfriend, or a girlfriend is the worst thing imaginable...
- the point is, rejection, or being afraid of rejection...is one of the ways many men and women answer the question – who are you?...
- this morning, we'd like to study how Jesus Christ can help you replace that answer with something far better...
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to Ephesians chapter 1...page 151 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...
- we're in the middle of a 7 week series entitled **Who Are You? – Coming to Grips with Your Identity in Christ.**
 - we've been trying to point out that we all have different lens, or ways we choose to think about ourselves...answers to the question, who are you?...
 - and once those glasses are on, they impact the way we respond to the people and events around us...
 - and the truth of the matter is...frequently, those glasses contain ideas that are patently wrong...
 - and therefore whatever else flows out of that is going to be skewed as well...
 - so the point of this series is to encourage you to take a careful look at your glasses, at the way you would answer the question "Who are you?..." ...and if any of those answers are incorrect---to replace those lens with biblical truth...

- in our first study, we looked at Zechariah chapter 3, and asked...are you...**Ashamed or Forgiven?**
- then last week Pastor Green posed the question from Romans 6, are you **Bound or Free?**
 - and many have told me what a wonderful service that was...so thanks to all who were involved...
- this morning we want to look at Ephesians 1 along with a couple of other important parallel passages and ask, are you **Rejected or Adopted?**
- with that in mind, please follow along as I read beginning at Ephesians 1:1...**Read Ephesians 1:1-14**

- we're asking this morning, are you rejected or adopted, and with the time we have remaining, let's think about **3 perspectives on your position in God's family**...who you were, who you are, and who you can be...

I. Who You Were – A Son of Disobedience.

- now, I realize you might say – I'm not sure I like the sound of that...
- well, that's the thing about biblical theology...it turns the volume up on all aspects of our identity...
- many people in our world think that we'll all part of God's family...it's part of our birthright as human beings, or as Americans, or whatever...
- that's why the doctrine of adoption would not have much impact on many people, because they are unclear about the true nature of their family of origin, spiritually speaking...
- see, if you don't have a reason to appreciate or cherish the implications of the doctrine of adoption, you're not fully prepared to handle the rejection of our world...
- so we start with who you were...please look over 1 chapter from the one we just read...
 - **read Ephesians 2:1-3...**

A. Dead in trespasses and sins – Eph. 2:1

- it's the terrible picture of a spiritual still-birth...
- Paul said it this way in Romans 5... **Romans 5:12 - Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—**
- this goes along with what you studied with Pastor Green last week from Romans 6 about being enslaved...in fact, please turn over to Romans chapter 8 to see the connection between these two concepts...page 122 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you – we'll be back in Ephesians 1 in a moment...but this is one of the important parallels to Ephesians 1...
- **read Romans 8:12-18**

- the contrast to being spiritually adopted in Ephesians 1 is being spiritually dead in trespasses and sins...
- the contrast to being spiritually adopted in Romans 8 is being enslaved...
- its two sides of the same coin...
- and the Scripture is very clear---that is the condition in which every human being is born...totally depraved...not in the sense that we are as bad as we could possibly be, but in the sense that there is nothing about us that can inherently bring praise and honor to God...
- **Hebrews 11:6 - And without faith it is impossible to please Him...**
- **Proverbs 21:4 - ...the plowing of the wicked, is sin.**

- Back in Ephesians 1, we also saw that without Christ, we were also...

B. Following the course of this world.

- **Ephesians 2:2 - in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.**
- in other words, just going with the flow...
- caught up in our world's values and pursuits...dead to the things of God...

C. Indulging the desires of our flesh and our minds.

- **Ephesians 2:3 - Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind...**
- we did what we wanted to do, and we thought what we wanted to think...we were sons of disobedience...and most of us could tell stories all day long how that was true...
- whose your daddy?....disobedience was one of the answers we could have rightly given...walking according to the character of "the prince of the power of the air" – the very adversary of God, the devil himself...and even worse...

D. By nature, the children of wrath.

- **Ephesians 2:3 -- ...were by nature, the children of wrath, even as the rest.**
- see, the goal of this series is not to sugar coat the story line...for a person who is thinking biblically...the answer to the question..."who were you" is not a very pretty picture...
- now, let's say something else about this series...last week we decided to use a drama to depict a particular theological truth which I know was very effective...
- and the week before that we used some scenes from a well known movie to help make the point...
- and all of that is good in its place and as a pastoral staff we make those decisions together to use such methods from time to time...
- but all of that is intended to reinforce biblical truth, not replace it...
- our church was built on solid exposition of the Scripture...line upon line, and precept upon precept...
- and I realize that what we're talking about right now is not particularly pleasant or easy to hear...
 - but just like Jesus said... **Matthew 4:4 - But He answered and said, “It is written, Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God...”**
 - or in **John 17:17 - Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.**
- now you might say – PV--if we're having a study on the joy of being adopted into the family of God, why is it even necessary to take time to think about who we were?...
 - that's a great question...
 - here's the answer...
 - 1. To be sure we don't confuse our adoption with a beauty pageant...
 - you've seen instances in old books or movies where people come to choose an orphan and all the kids are lined up and the cutest one is chosen for adoption...
 - that's not the case here...what we've studied so far makes it clear that God did not adopt us because of our pudgy cheeks and sweet disposition...
 - this isn't like going to Meijer and picking out bananas...[which ones are the very best?...]

- I'll take the best ones home...
- Moses told the children of Israel...**Deuteronomy 7:7-8 - The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.**
- C.S. Lewis wrote – “**Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.**” (**Mere Christianity, Chapter 9.**)
- That starts by acknowledging who we were...so there's no question that His adoption is motivated by, and based solely on His grace...
- now, all of this puts us in a position to rejoice in...

II. Who You Are – Adopted by a Merciful Father.

- If there has been a definite time in your life where you have admitted your sin, and turned to Christ in repentance and faith...on the basis of His finished work on the cross, you were adopted into the family of God...
 - and that can and should become an essential answer to the question...who are you?
 - and please notice what our verses in Ephesians 1 emphasize about that...it is...
- A. Part of God's eternal plan.**
- no one can fully explain the balance between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, but this passage is clear...
 - **Ephesians 1:4-5 - just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will...**
 - how long has our adoption been in the planning stages?...before the foundation of the world...
 - now, here's the big question...what's the point of this metaphor?...of all the word pictures God could have used to describe His relationship with us...why adoption?...to emphasize that we've been...

B. Welcomed into God's family.

- now you might say – if everything we've already studied is true of me, and God is holy...how could I be welcomed into His family?...

1. By the miracle of the new birth.

- unlike a typical adoption, a follower of Christ first has to be born again...
- your sin has to be forgiven...and your heart has to be changed...
- that's why Jesus told Nicodemus...
- **John 3:3 - Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”**
- and that begins the miraculous work of grace that makes it possible for people like you and me to become holy and blameless before Him...*(v. 4)*...John MacArthur wrote...

To be saved is to have the very life of God in our souls, His own Spirit enlivening our spirit. Human parents can adopt children and come to love them every bit as much as they love their natural children. They can give an adopted child complete equality in the family life, resources, and inheritance. But no human parent can impart his own distinct nature to an adopted child. Yet that is what God miraculously does to every person whom He has elected and who has trusted in Christ. He makes them sons just like His divine Son.

Christians not only have all of the Son's riches and blessings but all of the Son's nature (John MacArthur, Commentary on Ephesians, p. 15).

- who are you?...if you know Christ – you're an adopted child of God...
- we've all experienced new babies in our families, or in the lives of one of our friends...
- but there is nothing like holding a new baby in your arms...
- that's the metaphor God used to speak about you...

- and there's no question about the fact that your adoption was...

2. For God's good pleasure.

- Ephesians 1:5 - having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

- [show pic of our family]

- most of you know that two of our three children are adopted...after Kris and I had Bethany, we were unable to have additional children...so Bethany began praying for a sister...
- I cannot describe for you what it was like at our house when we received a call in the middle of the night that a little girl had been born and her birth mother decided that it would be best in her case to place her in a more stable family...
- we literally could not go back to sleep...the next night I was scurrying around trying to find parts to the baby bed thinking I can't believe we have the privilege of adopting a baby...You could not wipe the grin off our faces...
- that's why we gave Karis the name we did – that's the Greek word for grace...because we have always viewed her as a marvelous gift of grace...
- then several years later we had the opportunity to adopt Andrew...
 - and he too has filled our lives with joy...
 - we still kid around about the day we brought him home...
 - and I have no idea where this came from, but we tell him that he was so small when we brought him that we wrapped him in a taco shell...and he always gets a kick out of that story, especially in light of his size as a 17 year old...
 - but any parent who has ever had the privilege of adopting a child can speak about the incredible joy that came when that event occurred...

- here's the point this morning – if there has been a definite time when you've trusted Christ --- that's the way God feels about you...His grace is so sufficient that He could adopt you, and change you, and do it according to the good pleasure of His will...
- who are you?..is you know Christ, you're adopted into the family of God...

- now, where does that take us?...

III. Who You Can Be.

A. Cultivating increasing intimacy with your Father.

- Romans 8:15 - For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"**
- the word "Abba" literally means "pappa..."
- it is a term of intimacy and familiarity that is reserved for the closest of family relationships...

- who are you? – Someone who is seeking to develop a loving relationship with the very God of heaven and earth...
- We have had a special team of consultants working with us on this series...
- it's the young ladies at VOH...
- and we asked them about the issue of view of self...and wrong lens through which to answer the question, Who Are You? and they were a tremendous source of help...
- one young lady said something to me that was very profound – she said, I viewed my relationship God through the grid of my performance...He threw the frisbee and I ran as hard as I could to go catch it and as long as I did right...He patted me on the head...
- but our relationship was based solely on my performance...
- God does not want to relate to you simply on the basis of what you do – He wants to relate to you on the basis of who you are – a child whose position in the family has been purchased by the blood of His Son...

B. Secure in your relationship with Him.

- **Romans 8:16 - The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God,**
- **John 1:12 - But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,**
- **John 10:28-30 - and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. “My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. “I and the Father are one.”**

[if time – could talk about how that really helps us when we mess up...cf. the time you and some buddies stole some construction supplies and were caught by the police and dad had to come down to the station to pick you up..."you messed up, but you're still my son...]

C. No longer ruled by the potential rejection of others.

- please think about how this impacts what we talked about at the beginning...
- you may have experienced significant rejection from others in the past...but the Person who matters the most has adopted you into His family, and there's nothing that anyone can ever do to change that...
- you can also view the possible rejection from others in the future in a different light...
- **Psalm 27:10 - For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me up.**
- [if time – could talk about developing “holy indifference” toward those who might choose to reject you – that was Paul’s point later in Romans 8 – who can bring a charge against God’s elect...]

D. Satisfied in the resources of Christ instead of the material possessions of the world.

Romans 8:17 - and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...

- [develop leadership phase of our capital campaign – people who find their joy in being an heir with Christ, not in how much material stuff they can amass...]

E. Even embracing suffering because of its purifying work.

- being adopted is especially reassuring during a time of suffering...
- **Romans 8:17-18 - and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**
- sometimes fathers have to discipline their sons...
- **Hebrews 12:7 - It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom *his* father does not discipline?**
- when instances like that occur, it actually confirms our Father's love for us...
- and when it has nothing to do with wrong choices we've made, we can rest assured that our Father will never give us more than we can bear...