

Adopted in him

The Christian's True Identity

By Jonathan Landry Cruse

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Galatians 3:26
Preached on: Sunday, July 15, 2018

Kalamazoo Community Presbyterian Church
2131 Alamo Avenue
Kalamazoo, MI 49006

Website: kalamazoopc.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/kalamazoopc

Galatians chapter 3 verse 23.

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. 24 So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. 25 But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Thus far as the reading of God's holy word to us this morning.

"Our Father who art in heaven," the words echo in countless sanctuaries and worship halls, as they did here moments ago, as people around the world recite this staple of historic Christian liturgy. We know it by heart, but do our hearts know it, and I'm specifically referring to those first two words, "Our Father"? Do we truly understand what it means that we can call God our Father? I've been saddened, surprised and saddened as I've interacted with people throughout the years that especially perhaps even Reformed people that we understand a lot about God, but it's hard to make this connection that he loves us as a father loves his children, yet as I hope to prove this morning, there is no greater blessing than being part of God's family and having him as our never failing, never leaving, ever living, everlasting Father in heaven.

Now when we refer to God as Father, we're talking about the first person of the Trinity and we call him that because of his relation to the second person of the Trinity, he is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And while it's true that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, the only begotten Son of God, he's not the only Son of God. On the contrary, as C.S. Lewis has memorably put it, the Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God. And indeed, Paul goes on to say, just a few verses later in chapter 4 of Galatians, verse 4, that the purpose for which he sent his Son into the world was so that we might receive adoption as sons. Or Hebrews 2 puts it like this, that the

mission of redemption was to bring many sons to glory and this happens only through our union with Christ. This is the topic we've been considering the past four or five weeks, union with Christ, what it means to be in Jesus and this is what Paul says in Galatians 3:26.

You notice the language, right, that in Jesus we are all sons of God. We are brought into such a vital and real union with Jesus Christ that we can actually receive the title that truly only rightly belongs to him, Son of God. We can be called sons of God because we are united to the Son of God. By the Spirit, we are drawn into the divine family, and we can call Jesus our brother and God our Father and this process is called, rightly so, adoption. Adoption gets at the heart of what it means to be a Christian, friends. Adoption gets at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. J. I. Packer said that adoption is the highest privilege that the gospel offers. He says it's higher even than justification because adoption is higher, he says, because of the richer relationship with God that it offers. Similarly, John Murray says that adoption is the apex of grace and privilege. So if we don't grasp the concept of adoption, we have failed to grasp the relationship that we have with God and that will inevitably lead to frustration and failings on our part. We will miss out on the bountiful blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus. And so today, for just a moment even, we want to bask in the goodness of God to us in calling us his children and adopting us into his family. We want to look at just three of the privileges that come with our adoption. First, identity. Second, an intimacy. And thirdly, and finally, an inheritance that is ours.

First, adoption is a matter of identity or we could say status. It's a matter of identity or status in that it comes with a name change. It comes with a new address. We now belong to God and we belong to his kingdom. We now have a house key to heaven. Yes, it's true, the gospel comes with a house key but the first house key that it comes with isn't primarily one that we can open up our homes to other people, it's one with which God opens up his home to us. Before we were defined by our sin and our guilt and the door read "No admittance," now we are cleansed by the blood of Christ and God's home becomes ours. Before our union with Christ, we were children of wrath but now, as John says, see what kind of love the Father has given to us that we should be called, that we should be identified, that we should have the status of children of God, and so we are.

Indeed, this is a privileged status. There is a misconception that God is the Father of all of mankind, something known as the universal Fatherhood of God, and it goes hand in hand with another erroneous doctrine called the universal brotherhood of man, and the idea is that, well, God is the Father of every human being and therefore we're all part of one big happy family. But this is wrong. God is the Creator of every human being. He's the Maker of every human being. But the Bible is very clear that he is only the Father of those who are in Christ Jesus. Calling God Father is something that Christians can do, and only Christians. When we are in Christ, then we experience a relationship with God that the world doesn't understand. John goes on to say that in that previously quoted verse, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us," it's 1 John 3 verse 1, "that we should be called children of God and so we are," and then he says, "the reason why the world does not know us is that it does not know him." So this is something that's unique

to us, something that belongs to us, and far from uniting the world and the bonds of family, our adoption as sons of God gives us an identity that actually sets us apart from the world. It's unique to us. It belongs just to those who have faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, we need to be clear, though. It's important to understand that although we are recognized as sons of God in Christ, we do not have the same relationship to God as Christ. He is alone the eternally begotten Son of the Father and that's why the term adoption is so important here. So St. Augustine says this, Paul says, adoption, so that we will clearly understand that the Son of God is unique for we are the sons of God through his generosity and the condescension of his mercy, whereas he is the Son by nature sharing in the same divinity as the Father. So in other words, the second person of the Trinity is a son by nature. We can become sons by grace. It's a status or it's an identity that is conferred upon us. It's not something that is intrinsic within us. We are brought into the family because Jesus shares, he shares his sonship with us.

In fact, the Greek word for adoption explains a little bit of this to us. I don't like to get into all that linguistic detail that often, but this is interesting and important to understand. The Greek word for adoption used in the New Testament is *huiothesia* and that's actually made up of two separate Greek words. *Huios* means son, and then *tithami*, where you get that *thesia* part, or *thesis*, means placing. So you have the word for son, you have the word for placing, and you put it together, and it means son placed. It means placed as sons. When we look to Christ in faith, we are placed into God's family as if we were sons and this is extremely good news, friends, because if you do not relate to God as his son, you will not relate to God at all. You will not belong to God at all. It needs to come with this identity as a child of God, with this legal declaration that God makes in eternity past that you are his child.

So we start here with the blessing of identity or of adoption in a legal sense, but we don't end there. If you just end with this legal sense, then it's better to think of relating to God as a father-in-law. I don't know what your relationship is like with your in-laws, but that doesn't necessarily mean something good if you're relating to God as your father-in-law or relating to Christ as a brother-in-law. The Bible says more than that, that we are actually God's children, that Christ is actually our brother. So don't get the wrong impression. Just because we're talking about something that's been legally declared, it doesn't mean it's a lifeless formal doctrine. It's actually a legality that produces a loving relationship. Just as we would say in adoption that takes place nowadays, that just because the parents need to, the new parents need to sign some legal documents, it doesn't mean that they love the child any less. In fact, we could say the opposite because they're willing to go through this process confirms the love that they have for this child.

That's what covenants were. They were a blending of law and love. God would enter into a covenant with his people, right? And he would set down strict rules and there would need to be an arrangement and an agreement but it didn't mean that God didn't love them. It actually was a sign of his love. So too, adoption is God's covenanting to give us an identity of sonship but we need to understand, with that identity comes an intimacy with

God, the second blessing of adoption. There's an intimacy. There's a closeness. There's a warm and assuring relationship that comes with adoption.

One way to prove this is through a single tiny word in Aramaic, Abba. Abba, a word that's only used three times in the whole Bible. Two of the times it's used by Paul in the parallel passages of Galatians 4, you see that there in the opening verses of Galatians 4, but then also in Romans 8. Let's turn to Romans 8 for a moment. We're going to look at a few different verses there. But for now, Romans 8, starting in verse 14 and see the way that Paul uses this term. Romans chapter 8, starting verse 14, and we'll read through verse 16. "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

So what Paul's saying here is that the Holy Spirit tells us, or even convinces us that we belong to God as his sons, and one of the ways that the Spirit does this is by enabling us to cry out, "Abba." Okay, and we might be thinking, big whoop, why does that matter that we can use this term, Abba? Well, perhaps you've heard it said that this is a word that is quite familiar or informal, meaning something like daddy or pops or something like that. Not to burst your bubble if you've heard that, it's not really accurate. It is certainly a term used in the family and usually, yes, by younger children, but it had a ring of respect to it for sure, and so that's not the main takeaway when you come across this term, Abba. That's not what Paul's trying to tell you, that you can call God daddy. Certainly though, here's the question, there are Greek words known to Paul that would have conveyed the same meaning, a term used by a young child in the family for their father, a term of love, but also respect. There were Greek words that Paul could have used, yet he uses this Aramaic term, Abba. Why does he use this word? And the answer is because that's the language Jesus used. This is the language Jesus spoke, Aramaic. This is the very cry that Christ gave at one of his darkest and most depressing moments in the Garden of Gethsemane, moments before he was betrayed and arrested and then crucified. I said there were three times this word is used, Galatians, Romans, and the other is in Mark 14, this moment when Jesus is faced with the unbearable task of divine wrath and physical torment, and Jesus simply needs his Father. He needs to cry out to his Father. He needs help. He needs comfort. And with any and all pretense stripped away, he allows himself to bear his soul, and he cries out in prayer, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Remove this cup from me! Remove your penalty for wrath from me! Don't make me go through this," he says, and then, of course, he concludes it, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours be done." But this is what Jesus cries out. This is how he speaks to God in his moment of need and Paul, in using this word, is saying, "Look, he's hearkening back to this moment. He's throwing us, his readers, back to this scene and he's saying, do you see this? Do you see what's happening here? Do you see that intimacy? Do you see that relationship where even the Son of God in his hour of darkness can cry out to his Father and know that he is heard by him? That's what you have," Paul says. "This is the relationship that you have."

This is the intimacy that you have and it's truly astounding, isn't it? It's meant to take our breath away. We need to see it like this, that in justification God takes his throne of judgment and he turns it into a seat of mercy, but then in adoption he welcomes us up on his lap. This is the kind of intimate access that we have to God and it's, incidentally, it's experienced most fully through prayer. Let's talk about prayer for a moment. It's no wonder that Paul connects the topic of prayer with his discussion of adoption by the Spirit because the two go together. He goes on to say in Romans 8, if you look at verse 26, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." Paul's saying that the same Spirit that adopts you into the family of God, brings you into the family of God, teaches you how to speak with God as Father, and that is through prayer. Prayer is not first and foremost a formal address to a great King, it is first and foremost a family conversation.

In his excellent book, "A Praying Life," Paul Miller says that we need to get this if we're going to appreciate prayer and ever pray with meaning. He says the heart of prayer is being able to come to God as a child, messy, dependent, filled with questions, but also filled with hopeful anticipation. And when the Spirit dwells in us by faith, this is what he's teaching us, he's teaching us how to come to God as, as our Father. He's teaching you how to be a child again. He's teaching you that because you are in Christ, you relate to God as a child would relate to their father. And this is what Timothy Keller writes in his book on prayer, he says the Spirit gives believers certainty that their relationship with God does not now depend on their performance as it does in the relationship between an employee or an employer. It depends on parental love, Keller says. The Holy Spirit takes a theological proposition and turns it into an inner confidence and joy. You know that God responds to your cry with the intense love and care a parent responding to the cry of pain of his or her child. Because you are in Jesus the true Son, you can go to God with the confidence of receiving that kind of attention and love, Paul says.

We can do that anytime. Isn't that amazing? We can do that anytime. Think of how hard it must be for someone to get a meeting with the president, say, or some other high ranking official, not only do they have an army of secretaries and assistants that guard their schedule, but then they literally have agents who are trained with the sole purpose of keeping people out and yet a little child could walk past all of that just because she wants to see mommy or daddy, right? That parent-child bond breaks down any kind of barriers that there would have been otherwise and this is the privilege that we have as children of God. We can go right up to him anytime we want and, oh, that we would want it more. Do you want it? Do you want that access to God? Do you seek that intimacy with God through prayer? I hope you would see that prayer, which we often view as a chore, is actually one of the greatest gifts imaginable, that God brings us into the deepest communion with him that we could ever imagine through prayer and prayer is a privilege of adoption.

Now, a seemingly less appealing aspect of being adopted by God is now we also receive parental correction and discipline. No one likes going through trials, no one enjoys hardships, but there is consolation for the Christian that our trials and hardships are proof

that we are children of God. This is what the author to the Hebrews says in chapter 12, verse 7, "It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?" Discipline is a proof of parental love, because if a father doesn't care about his son, he's just going to let him do whatever he wants. He's not going to go through the time and the energy and the effort that it takes to correct him. That's why the next verse says if you are left without discipline, then you are an illegitimate child and you are not a son.

Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that you need to enjoy discipline. I'm not sure there's anybody out there who enjoys their parents' discipline, but the author of the Hebrews says we do need to endure it. We need to be strong, steadfast. We need to not grow discouraged or give up on God because oftentimes when we go through trials, our conclusion is, "God doesn't love me. God's putting me through this, so he must not care for me. He must not have my best interests at heart. Why should I continue to follow him?" But on the contrary, God's heavenly chastisement is proof that he actually wants what's best for you. Discipline and afflictions are a sign not of God's neglect, but of his fatherly care because it's through these trials that we encounter that God's preparing us for heaven. Heaven is a place where sin is not allowed to enter, and so we need to be glorified in heaven. We need to have all sin and sinfulness removed, but that process actually starts now. We call it sanctification, right, where God removes and rebukes and makes us more like him.

This is another privilege of adoption, only sons are sanctified. We're going to talk about sanctification more in another sermon, but for now, recognize that this is a privilege of adoption. We've been ushered into God's family, and now the Spirit's work is to make us resemble that family, to be more holy. We could say it like this, through our union with Christ, we have been placed in the Son in order to be shaped like the Son. Renowned 17th century Dutch theologian, Hermann Witsius, wrote that the sons of God by grace have some resemblance to the Son of God by nature. We're being made to look more and more like Jesus, the true Son of God. Does it sting? Yes. Does it hurt? Yes. Does it mean that God loves you? Absolutely. Trials mean that God loves you.

Words of famous football coach Tom Landry, that's who I was named after, by the way, that's why I had to sneak him in here. He refers to his job in the NFL and it's fitting of God's work as a corrective Father. This is what Landry says about being a coach. He says, "The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to be what they've always wanted to become." The job of a coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to be what they've always wanted to become. This is true for us, right? God brings us through great discipline, but it's all in the service of giving us our deepest desire to be like him.

So far we've seen the blessings of adoption, that it gives us an identity that sets us apart from the world, it brings us into an intimacy with the Father where we can cry out to him whenever we want and he corrects us, even when we don't want, but thirdly and finally, and briefly here, there's one other blessing to touch upon, and that's the inheritance that is ours when we become children of God. Again, if you look at Romans chapter 8, verses

16 and 17, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then," what, "then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Anytime you come across language in the Bible of inheritance, you're coming across language of adoption, talking about adoption, and here's where we need to know something of the first century Greco-Roman world in which Paul is writing because in our day and age we tend to think of adoption primarily in terms of being for the benefit of the child, right, that's why you adopt. In adoption, we rescue children from abortion or orphan-hood or some other kind of evil, and we bring them, the child, into the safety, security of a loving family. But that's hardly the purpose of adoption back in the first century. When Paul talks about adoption in Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, he's not thinking about that at all because back then, adoption was not for the purpose of the child, it was for the purpose of the family. It was for the benefit of the family. If a family had no son to carry on the family line, what would they do? They would adopt a son. They would bring a stranger in and make him part of the family for the sole purpose of taking over when the patriarch dies, somebody to continue the dynasty on. An adopted son would become the heir of the family. He was brought in really to reign, to rule, and when Paul is writing about adoption, that's what he has in mind and he says that's what's true of you and me.

When we are adopted, we're brought in to rule, to reign, to become inheritors of God's family and this is, incidentally, this is why the language of sons is used exclusively in the New Testament as opposed to sons and daughters. Some people think that's best outdated, at worst perhaps chauvinistic or sexist, right? Why doesn't Paul say sons and daughters? He talks about sons, sons. That's not the takeaway that it's outdated or sexist. Paul's making a point here that back then, sons were the ones who were adopted because sons were the ones that received the inheritance. Daughters didn't really have a role to play in that regard and so Paul is being intentional here. He says adoption means inheritance. Sons get the inheritance. And yet such is the glory of the gospel that we all, whether we're male or female, can be called sons. We all can become inheritors.

Now, of course, God doesn't need to bring anyone in to take over the family dynasty as was necessary in the first century. He has a Son, the eternally begotten second person of the Trinity, and indeed, the riches of the universe are his possession. He's the heir of all things, Hebrews says, because all things were made for him, Colossians says. And yet, through our union with Christ, we can rightly be called co-heirs, fellow-heirs with Christ. That inheritance that belongs to the Son of God by right can belong to you and me by grace when we, through faith, are brought in to the family of God. We can know that we will rule with him, we will reign with him, for we are sons in him.

Brothers and sisters, the Bible has no conception of a believer relating to God in any way other than as Father and yet, sadly, so little of us get it. We know it intellectually. We may say the Lord's Prayer by heart anytime we are prompted to at church, and yet we fail to grasp the importance of it all. We love him as Lord. We love him as our Redeemer in Christ. We are awed by his sovereignty. We bow before his justice, and yet when it comes to approaching him as a beloved child would approach their father, we balk. We stumble. We stagger. We don't get it. And yet God united us to Christ for the very

purpose that in him we too would be sons. Friends, with our union to Jesus comes every blessing imaginable, but there truly is nothing more assuring than knowing you have more than a Judge in heaven, more than a Savior even, you have a Father. And I think this is why John Calvin's last will and testament reads like this. He says that, "God brought me into the light of the gospel, though my many sins and shortcomings were such that I deserve to be rejected by him 100,000 times over." He says, "I have no hope or refuge other than his gracious adoption upon which my salvation depends."

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that we can call you Father, we can cry out to you in the very same way that the eternally begotten Son can cry out to you, that we share with him the status of Son. We have that same intimacy and relationship with you and we know that that means that no matter what trials or tribulations we face in this life, no matter what poverty might strike us, we have an inheritance, an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for us. We praise you for your glorious grace, which has made us coheirs with Christ, even though our sins and shortcomings were such that we deserve to be rejected by you 100,000 times over. So indeed, we have no other hope or refuge than your gracious adoption to us and we recognize that our salvation depends solely on it. So we thank you and we praise you, our Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.