

## ADOPTION

*Gal 4:1-6*

Do you ever get confused by theological words? I was speaking with a missionary one time, and he said that one of the most difficult things for a translator is to find the concept and/or the terminology of theological words. The common, everyday words are easy. “Coffee” is the morning brew we drink. “Automobiles” are vehicles we drive, and “trains and planes” are vehicles in which we ride. “Clothes” are something we wear, and “clocks” tell us the time.

But what is “sanctification?” How do we translate the meaning of “propitiation” in an understandable way? When it comes to words like “regeneration” and “justification,” it can be difficult to convey meaning in foreign cultures. And yet I sometimes wonder if we, too, grow confused over Biblical terminology. For example, what does the word “Gospel” mean?

It is the “good news” that Jesus Christ came to the earth, lived a sinless life, and became the payment for man’s sin. But death could not keep a sinless substitute, and as a display of God’s approval, Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to Heaven, and is now seated at the Father’s right hand. The gospel is the “good news” that all who confess and turn from their sins; all who believe in the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross; all who ask Jesus to save them, are promised eternal life with him in Heaven.

The gospel is “good news.” But there is another word that is embedded in the gospel that deepens its meaning. It’s a term that makes it broader, more weighty, more joyous, more “good.” The term of which I refer is the word “Adoption.”

It has been said that “Adoption is the heart of the gospel.” It is a term that translates us from slaves to sons, and when we are sons, we inherit all that God has to offer us. *In this article, I would like us to consider this word, “Adoption.”* I begin by pointing out that the word only occurs 5 times in the entire NT. Three times in Romans (8:15 & 23, Rom 9:4), once in Ephesians 1:5, and finally in Galatians 4:4-7. It is the Galatians passage that I want to consider further.

Galatians 4:4—*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, <sup>5</sup>To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. <sup>6</sup>And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. <sup>7</sup>Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

Generally, when speaking of the theological terms that surround our salvation, we need a definition before we can understand its full meaning. However, the word “adoption” does not need defining. We all understand that it is *the legal process whereby a family brings a child (born to a different family) into their home and makes that child their own.*

When it comes to God’s adoption of us, we should first note that adoption comes at a great cost. That is true for humans, and it was true for God. Notice verse 4: *But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, <sup>5</sup>To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.*

The word “redeem” means “to obtain or to set free by paying a price.” Galatians 3:13 tells us that the price God paid to set us free was the life of His Son! Peter tells us that we were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. Instead, God’s payment was the precious blood of Jesus Christ. (1 Pt 1:18-19)

The message of those words ring out good news because we are all sinners. None of us are able to get to God on our own merits because we are all born sinners. We are all born under the condemnation of God, and there is no way for us to pay our sin debt. There is no way for us to redeem ourselves from the curse of sin which is death. And yet, in His love, God sent Jesus Christ to redeem us. He paid the price to set us free. He gave His life as a ransom for you and me. That is the gospel, and Augustus Toplady captured it well when he wrote:

*Not the labor of my hand, can fulfill the Law’s demands,  
Could my zeal no respite know,  
Could my tears forever flow,  
All for sin, could not atone;  
Thou must save and Thou alone!*

It is Jesus who reconciles us to the Father, and once reconciled, the Father adopts us as His own. Now think about the cost. There is an emotional cost involved in adoption. On a human level, once a person is a parent, he will never stop being a parent. Parents shout and cheer when their child hits his first home run or score their first goal. They cry when their child goes off to college, and they spend countless nights lying awake concerned about their child's spiritual wellbeing. In some ways, God is no different. No, He is not jumping up and down in heaven's courtroom when we make straight A's. To be sure, He is never anxious or worried or scared for us. However, He is grieved when our love and care for the world is more important than our love for Him. He is grieved when we disregard obedience to His Word for temporary and fleeting pleasures that the spirit of our age offers. And yet there is great joy on God's part when repentance is made. He is the eager Father looking out for His prodigal son's return, and when we turn from sin and turn towards God, we find great forgiveness. *All because we are His child!* Because Jesus gave His life, we have the great privilege in being adopted! Yet that adoption comes at a great cost.

Secondly, we should consider how God's adoption provides complete inheritance and total privilege. Notice the two superlatives: "*complete*" and "*total*." In verse 5 we read: "*that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" Why doesn't Paul say "*adoption of sons and daughters.*" Is Paul being chauvinistic? Does the Holy Spirit, who is writing through Paul, regard women as subservient? Is this an example of how the Bible is archaic and not relevant for our modern day? Why does Paul not make it more friendly and inclusive—pointing out both men and women? The answer is significant! Paul is not being exclusive or showing preference to men. What he is reflecting is the culture of his day

In the ancient times of the OT and NT, a family's legacy and continuance was passed down through the sons. In other words, in Paul's day, all livelihood, all material wellbeing, all security provided to a man's wife and children were passed down through the son. It isn't that women had no value, but their place in the family was seen as temporary. In some ways, that still happens today. When my daughters marry, their names will change. Yes, they will still be "Fernetts," but their change in marital status will reflect the family name of their husbands. The same was said in Bible times, but bigger issues were at stake in those days.

In that culture, daughters did not have the same legal rights. Daughters received protection and certain privileges, but they did not receive things like the family inheritance. Daughters did not receive the family business or dad's seat on influential councils. Yes, daughters were important to a family, but sons had an *elevated* status as they were in line to receive all of the privileges, all of the influence, all of the material substance his family had to offer. Yet if a family had no sons, the most legally valid option for carrying on the family name was the adopting of a son.

So when Paul says that God has adopted us as sons, he is not segmenting out the female section of God's people. We know that because in Galatians 3, the apostle says that there is neither male nor female; he then refers to us all as sons. **What he is doing is not segmenting, but elevating all of us to a level of privilege!** Before our salvation we were slaves. Before our salvation we were male and female. Before our salvation we were Jew and Greek. But now, because of our salvation in Christ, we have shed those distinctions. Now, in Christ, we have one distinction—we are Sons!

In that culture, the word "*son*" communicated all the rights, all of the privileges, all of the advantages afforded by the father. What dad has, the son has...or will have one day. Now let's think on that in terms of our relationship with God. What does God have that we either now have or will have one day?

First, God has eternal life. He does not and cannot die. And even though death now reigns in us, there is coming a day when death will give up its hostages, and all of God's children will know eternal life! Second, God has holy righteousness. He has NO Sin. And even though we are presently capable of sinning, there is coming a day when we will shed this fleshly nature. In that day, we will be perfect, righteous, and sinless. Third, God rules over a perfect city, and because we are sons, we hold citizenship in that city. We are not there yet, but we are pilgrims looking for the day when we will enter it. Fourth, God has all power, all wisdom, all ability, and because we are sons, we have full access to Him. We can literally cast all of our cares upon Him because He cares for us (1 Pt 5:7). We have the privilege of calling Him "*Abba, Father*" (Gal 4:6).

When it comes to our salvation in Christ, *adoption* is a tremendously rich doctrine that should garner great praise from His people. It came at the great cost to God in the death of His Son, but it provides us with complete inheritance and total privilege. What a great, loving, merciful God we serve.