

A Royal Family
Romans 8.12-17
Dominion Covenant Church
Mike Elliott April 20, 2008

I. Introduction

Reading a story from an adoption agency,

Being unable to have children was paralyzing. Was there something we were doing wrong? Was it my fault? All around me were women getting pregnant and complaining about how unpleasant it is, men joking about their pregnant wives. Every day thousands of babies are aborted, abandoned to death by people who take it so casually. Do they realize how much we longed to have a child?

Over time God impressed upon us the option of adopting. At first we resisted and persisted in our own strength wanting to do it our way. But he is in charge and ultimately we came to grips with that. After all, His will is perfect and our vision is limited. It took months and months of interviews, piles and piles of paperwork, thousands and thousands of dollars. There were disappointments along the way when birthmoms chose other adoptive parents, costs became prohibitive, or certain countries abroad suddenly closed their doors.

If we had known it would take three years I wonder if we ever would have begun the journey. But God is faithful and he saw us through every twist and turn, every up and down. It was last July that we were waiting eagerly for “the phone call”. We’d been approved by the agency and met the birthmom. Her due date was a few days prior and with each passing hour we wondered, “is our baby born yet?” Part of me wondered if the birthmom had changed her mind. I had heard of that happening and braced myself. I didn’t want to get my hopes up too much for fear they would be dashed.

The phone rang. It was my mom wondering if we’d heard any news. Ughhh, no we hadn’t. I assured her we’d let her know as soon as we found out.

Hours passed. Of course we didn’t just sit frozen on the couch staring at the phone. We went about our daily activities but since it was a holiday weekend we had a lot of time to piddle around at home. The phone rang again. It was a neighbor kid offering to mow our lawn for 5 bucks. I guess we’d been neglecting things a bit and it showed!

Ten minutes, but what seemed like 10 years, later the phone rang again. It was a breathless adoption agency worker saying, “he’s here, he’s here.” At first it didn’t make sense. “Who? Where?” It was as if a pre-trib rapture prophet was proclaiming the Lord’s return but we had been too holed up in our house to hear the trumpet blast! Then she implored, “Your son. At the hospital!”

Within 20 minutes we were at the hospital and within two hours we got to hold him. Words could not express our joy as we gazed into his squinty eyes. As we prayed over him I was stuck with God’s words in Ephesians 1.5: “in love he predestined us to

be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will.” My heart melted at the reality of God the father’s love for us and my innate love for this precious new child. It cost us thousands of dollars to adopt him but it cost God much, much more to adopt his children.

II. Adoption in human and heavenly terms.

Many of us know similar adoption stories first hand or from close friends and family members. Nearly every time I hear one I am moved to tears because adoption captures so much that is dear to my heart and is, I think, dear to God’s heart. In the US there are about 130,000 adoptions each year, a similar number of older kids in foster care awaiting adoption, and several multiples of that number aborted. True religion cares deeply about orphans (James 1.27) and the plight of earthly orphans teaches us a lot about family.

Technically speaking, there are actually no spiritual orphans. Everyone has a father.

John 8.42 Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, ... **44** You are of *your* father the devil.”

To use today’s language, those whom God has predestined to be adopted into his family are delinquent children removed from abusive homes. This can happen at any age—often infants are adopted as well as children, young adults, all the way up to aged seniors on their deathbeds. While the vast majority of human adoptions involve adoptees below the age of three, God adopts people of all ages. Also, he is the ultimate international adoptive parent! He adopts people from every tribe and nation!

Another difference between human adoption and God’s adoption is the factor of initiative. Human parents have to fill out applications and be interviewed and approved with a whole set of criteria used to judge their suitability as adoptive parents. Also, the birth parents, or if old enough, the adoptee himself, has a great say in whether the adoption goes thru. The situation is entirely different with God’s adoption. He does not have to pass a review board, he gets to adopt whomever he wants, and the former parent has no say in the matter. The former parent, that is Satan, may object, but that is of no consequence to God.

Another difference has to do with visitation rights. Here I think the way earthly adoptions used to be done is a better model than how they are done now. It used to be that they were *closed*—the adoptee did not know who the birthparents were and the birthparents were not able to contact the child they put up for adoption. Nowadays most adoptions are *open* so all parties can

contact each other as they desire. Spiritual adoptions should be closed adoptions but all too often they are not. When we are adopted by God we should have a complete break from our former father, we should not be dabbling in his trade, hanging out with our former siblings, or have him in our life to the degree that we are influenced by him or try to emulate him. Instead we should be wholly consumed with our new family, focused on loving our new siblings and emulating our new father.

III. Paul's thought process.

I think God in his providence has made adoption such a critical issue in earthly families because it is critically important for his workings with man with regard to the heavenly family. And because it is so important to God, it is important to Paul. As was quoted in the story I read you, he mentions it in his letter to the Ephesians; he also speaks of it in Galatians and here in Romans.

A. Background of previous chapters.

To get a better idea of the crucial significance of adoption let's backtrack a bit and see where Paul is coming from that leads him to Romans 8.12. We see the "therefore" at the beginning of this verse and must ask, what is it there for? Part of the answer lies in the preceding portion of chapter 8 but I think that for a more complete answer we must go all the way back to chapter 5.

1. Romans 5: Absolute security comes through union with Christ.

In Chapter five he contrasts Death in Adam with Life in Christ. He goes back and forth describing the differences between being in Adam and being in Christ. The differences are real and serious.

i. Death in Adam. vv12-15a, 16a, 17a, 18a, 19a, 20a, 21a

ii. *versus* Life in Christ. vv15b, 16b, 17b, 18b, 19b, 20b, 21b

16 ... For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.

17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)

18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation,

even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.

19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,
so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound.

But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,

21 so that as sin reigned in death,

even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

In Adam's sin man died, judgment came from it resulting in condemnation, death reigned, and his followers are sinners under the reign of death. In Christ the gift of grace abounds to many, the free gift results in justification, those who receive abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life.

2. Romans 6: Union with Christ produces holiness.

i. Dead to Sin. Dead v2, Buried v4, Crucified v6

ii. *versus* Alive to God. Freed v7, Alive, v8

Then in Chapter 6 he contrasts being Dead to Sin with being Alive to God. The Christian is dead to sin since he has been buried and crucified with Christ. The Christian is freed from sin and alive with Christ Jesus.

3. Romans 7: The Law is powerless to produce holiness.

i. v1 versus v4

ii. vv23, 25 *versus* vv22, 23, 25

Paul continues this in chapter 7. As long as we are alive the law's condemnation has dominion over us but, since as he just mentioned the Christian is dead through Christ, he is dead to that condemnation. Also, while the flesh serves the law of sin leading to death, the inward man serves the law of God to life.

4. Romans 8: Justification done, Glorification guaranteed.

Therefore no condemnation for those in Christ

→ Spirit not flesh!

Thus Paul can say at the beginning of chapter 8, "there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!" Why not? Because they, we, do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. Indeed, God makes us his by having his Spirit dwell in us.

B. Flow of thought in this section.

1. If to the flesh...we will die. vv12b-13a

It is no surprise here that Paul continues this thread of Spirit versus flesh in the middle part of Romans 8. Again he wants us to understand that living according to, or being indebted to, the flesh only leads to death. The very same death of our forerunner Adam, the very same condemnation of unrighteousness.

2. If to the Spirit...we will live. vv12a+13b

But if we are indebted to the Spirit then we live; and live in a particular way. Let's look at that life in the spirit.

i. Leads us to “put to death the deeds of the body”. vv13b, 14

The first implication in this text that comes about from living in the Spirit rather than in the flesh is holiness. Verse 14: The Spirit leads us to put to death the deeds of the body. Elsewhere Paul enumerates those deeds: self-seeking, whispering, backbiting, boasting, disobedience to parents, sexual immorality, covetousness, idolatry, drunkenness, extortion, envy, murder, etc. Those who commit such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Rom 1.29-30, 13.13; 1Cor 5.11, 6.10; Gal 5.21). Those who are in the flesh cannot please God (8.8). These thoughts and actions are fatal. They must be stopped. Only through the agency of the Spirit are these deeds of the body put to death.

Notice the Spirit's work does not just produce a particular label, “Christian”, nor simply a status, i.e. “Son”. It does that for sure, but it produces a name and a position that also *results* in a certain lifestyle of holiness. Paul in effect says the same thing here as John does in 1 John 2.3: “Now by this we know that we love Jesus, if we keep his commandments.” To claim we are Christ's own but to continue to walk in the deeds of the flesh is to be in contradiction or worse yet to be a liar. We deceive ourselves if we think we are Christians yet we hold onto secret sins and tenaciously resist letting them go. It is the Spirit of God that bears witness with our spirit, bringing sin to the surface, exposing it, repenting of it, putting it to death that we may more and more live out the life of the inner man (7.23) renewed by God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4.24).

ii. Enables us to “cry out ‘Abba, Father.’” v15

The second implication that comes from living in the spirit rather than in the flesh is fellowship. I speak of both fellowship with God and other

people. The Spirit in us is the Spirit of Adoption that moves us to cry out to God as our father. To simply know that God exists is nothing special, even the demons acknowledge that (James 2.19). But by the Spirit of Adoption we know on the inside that God is our Father and we can cry out to him. The great gulf that existed between us because of our sin has been bridged; we are no longer aliens and foreigners but members of God's household.

Realization of this relationship will have a profound affect on our lives. Likely you children are being trained to be respectful to all adults, not just your parents. I am sure your parents would be heartbroken if you treated them exactly the same as you treat all other adults. If you were as lovey-dovey with other adults as with your folks they would be jealous. If you were as calmly respectful to your folks as you are with other adults they would think you did not love them.

God is a jealous God. He wants to be the sole object of our affection. We cannot divide our intimacy between him and others. He also doesn't want a plain, matter-of-fact, distant, respectful relationship. We owe him deep gratitude for bringing us into his family, for caring for us, for defending us, for nurturing us. Communicating our love to him for these things will take us beyond the simple, "Hello, God. Yes sir, God." We will instead cry out in heart-felt prayer, "Abba, Father. My soul yearns for you as in a dry and thirsty land. I look for you to see your power and glory. My lips praise you!" (Rom 8.15, Ps 63)

Further, as v 17 says, we are full-fledged sons. We are not second-class citizens or second-rate heirs. Adopted children have all the rights and privileges of naturally descended children. This is why Paul so vigorously fought against imposing circumcision as a requirement for Gentile believers. We are all equal before God, whether we come from Jewish roots or Gentile roots, whether we are male or female (Gal 3.28).

In addition to being sons of God and thus having a special, close relationship to our father, we also have a unique older brother: Christ. Imagine having the best older brother in the world—one who is always looking out for your best interest, who always intercedes on your behalf before your father, who tutors you and coaches you along as you grow into maturity. That is the type of family relationship we have. Not only do we have God the Father as our father but we have God the Son as our brother.

Of course, the fact that all Christians share the same father and older brother means that we all are brothers and sisters in the household of faith. Here in this church we encourage family unity. Too much of the world's

culture wants to destroy family unity and turn the allegiance of family members to things outside the family. Men's allegiances are turned to their careers or professional sports identities; women's allegiances are turned to careers or social groups; childrens' identities are turned to their peer group or extracurricular activities. To protect against these disintegrating forces, God says families should be intimately involved together in educational and spiritual growth. The result is that our families will have enlarged hearts for one-another.

The same is true for the Christian family. We should be taking an active interest in the physical and spiritual lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ—crying when they cry and rejoicing when they rejoice. Do we know what are each others' trials, fears, strengths, and weaknesses? When conflict arises do we aim for family peace and try to work it out or do we act like the bullying older brother or pouting younger brother? Likely we each pray for siblings and parents in our immediate families, but we also should pray for our siblings in our spiritual family.

iii. Gives us assurance and guarantee of being “children” and “heirs”. v17

It is at this very point that the evil one tries to creep in. He raises doubts. How do we know we are really in God's family? He creates division. How do we know that we should really care about others in the church family? It is not like we have a birth certificate, a home video of the delivery, or our parent lurking around the corner with a tangible spanking stick.

However, we do have proof that Adoption is real and the things that flow from it are real. From this text we see that we have both an inner and an outer witness.

Speaking of the inner witness, Paul writes that the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children and joint heirs. Elsewhere he says we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise who guarantees our inheritance (Eph 1.14). God keeps his promises, of that we can be sure.

Speaking of the outer witness, Spirit-wrought sanctification provides clear evidence. If we live according to the spirit, are spiritually minded, if we set our minds on the things of the spirit, if we are putting to death the deeds of the flesh, then we have the Spirit in us and we are God's children. Conversely, if we live according to the flesh, are fleshly minded, set our minds on fleshly things, and are still enjoying and delighting in the deeds of the flesh, then we do not have the Spirit in us and we are Satan's children.

The other outer testimony is our fellowship with God and other believers. Our fellowship with God will be manifested in rich and joyful prayer, confidence in his forgiveness, deep gratitude for his mercy, and yearning to know him better through his Word. Conversely, stale or disinterested prayer, presumption in his forgiveness, prideful contempt for his mercy, and coldness to his revealed truth all indicate lack of fellowship with God.

Lastly, our fellowship with brothers and sisters in the faith will be manifested by our love for the brethren, longsuffering, and forbearance regarding their shortcomings. Conversely, detachment from the brethren's needs, impatience, or judgmentalism all indicate a lingering pride of the self that is antithetical to true peer-to-peer fellowship.

IV. Implications of Adoption.

To put it another way, let me describe the implications of adoption in terms of inward, upward, and outward.

A. Inward—Sanctification.

Inwardly, Adoption affects us through sanctification. This is the “putting to death the deeds of the flesh”, v14. We put away the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts (Eph 4.22) and put on the new man in true righteousness and holiness (Eph 4.24). Holiness comes about step by step through Spirit filled living. He prompts us to take specific actions empowered by the Spirit, such as telling the truth instead of lying, resolving conflict quickly and graciously rather than letting sinful anger develop, working diligently rather than stealing, praying with confidence rather than with doubt, dressing in modest apparel rather than boastfully, flamboyantly, or provocatively, putting away bitterness and evil speaking to replace it with kindness and tenderheartedness (Eph 4.25-32 with 1Tim 8-9).

All of these are actions flowing from an inward work of the spirit: what we call sanctification. If we are sons, we will walk as children of light (Eph 5.8), shining light into the world (Phil 2.15).

B. Upward—Fellowship with God.

Upwardly, Adoption affects us through restoring and then enriching our fellowship with God. Once we were enemies, now we are friends (Col 1.21). Once we were foreigners, now we are citizens (Eph 2.18). Once we were of our father the devil, now we are of our Heavenly Father (Jn 8.42). Jesus spoke of his close fellowship with his Father and prayed for us to have that same intimacy.

John 17.20 “I do not pray for these [disciples] alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; **21** that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us

This one-ness with God comes about through prayer and meditation on the things of God, his will, and his nature.

C. Outward—Building a holy temple.

In that same prayer to his father, Jesus continued,

John 17.22 And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one

As joint heirs with Christ we are joint heirs with those who are joint heirs with Christ. That is, we are joint heirs with our brothers and sisters in the Lord. God’s intent is that through the church—the household of faith, the fellowship of brothers and sisters—his wisdom would be displayed for all to see (Eph 3.10).

To this end we must seek the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4.3). He has given various gifts to various individuals so that we all together would be equipped and edified (Eph 4.12), growing up into the fullness of Christ (Eph 4.13). We don’t want the fake peace of Jeremiah’s day (Jer 6.14, 8.11), but true peace that comes from challenging and encouraging one another to grow in godliness. If a brother sins against you, go speak with him face to face to be reconciled. If a brother approaches you for having sinned against him, be willing to listen and be corrected, else the hardness of your heart lead to being brought before the church and ultimately put out of the assembly (Matt 18.15-17).

As Paul says, collectively we are being built together for a holy temple in the Lord (Eph 3.21). Every part of that temple must be purified and cleansed or else the whole thing is tainted and corrupted. We should all, through kindness and tenderheartedness, submit to one another in the fear of God as we pursue the Lord’s will (Eph 5.17, 21).

V. Conclusion.

All this is to say that our adoption is vitally important. It is not just a neat little theological concept that paints an interesting relational picture. When human parents adopt a child they act toward it completely differently than if it was not their son or daughter. Likewise, an adopted child acts toward their parents quite differently than they would if they were not part of that family. In fact, but for the adoption the child and the parents would likely

not even know each other. In addition to simply knowing each other, adoption effects a completely new legal relationship between parent and child. Adopted children have all the rights and privileges of naturally descended children.

A. Are you in God's family?...Who is your father?

So first of all, adoption brings us into God's family, brings us into fellowship with him, and rescues us from certain death.

B. Is there proof you are in his family?...Is the spirit in you and are you growing in holiness?

Second, being in this family leads to personal holiness. Everything we do in every moment of every day should contribute to putting to death the deeds of the flesh and growing in godliness.

C. How are you relating to your family members?...Bearing each others' burdens, receiving and giving exhortation/admonition?

Third, being in this family means we have a whole host of very special siblings. Pre-eminently, we have Jesus Christ as our older brother. We also have an abundance of tangible siblings to care for. This involves knowing what their burdens are so we can bear them together. Also, we should be concerned enough about each others' sanctification to exhort and encourage a brother or sister when we see room for improvement. Along with that you should gratefully receive their admonishment when it is intended for your good.

Let me finish with a post at an adoption website telling the story of a father who has a child by birth and two adoptive sons of a different ethnicity. He spoke of the time a woman asked him (as he was holding the adopted infant), "Are you going to tell him he is adopted?" Of course his first thought was, "obviously they'll know, since the color of our skin is different!" He went on to write,

"I'm convinced that fewer questions like this one would be asked if we thought of *heavenly* adoption before we thought of *earthly* adoption. Why? Because for Christians adoption is central to what defines us. The apostle Paul is very clear: we are God's children through adoption... God is an adoptive Father. Jesus, our Elder Brother, is God the Father's eternal, only-begotten, natural Son. We believers are His children through adoption. This identity is fundamental to who we are. As adopted children, we enjoy all the rights and privileges of the relationship that God the Father enjoys with His eternal Son. This is an amazing reality and eternal privilege! We will forever be God's children through adoption.

(<http://www.carolinahopeadoption.org/blog/archives/404>)

Let us never forget our position before God. We didn't arrive here by good luck, or because we deserved it, but because he LOVED us, he CHOSE us, and he MADE us his own; tremendous privilege and tremendous responsibility. AMEN

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