

## Adoption: The Highest Privilege of the Gospel

*Galatians 4:1-7; November 3, 2013*

Page: 974

It's been a great week for Boston Red Sox fans. The turn out for the parade yesterday was pretty awesome (they were expecting two million plus). I didn't get to go but Leigh and the kids ventured down there with Jen Smith and Kevin and Kristi Curry. I caught some of it on TV and the parade route was packed all the way from Fenway to the Charles River, some three miles or so. Scores and scores of fans lined up to see their beloved Sox. Imagine another line, stretched all the way around the earth's equator. This line dwarfs the three miles from Fenway to the Museum of Science; it's some 24,901.55 miles.

**The Need:** All of the orphaned kids in the world, 153 million, would not fit in that line. The need is staggering.

**The Trend Today:** Adoption has almost become trendy today with numerous Hollywood stars adoption: Sandra Bullock, Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt, Jillian Michaels, Madonna, Nicole Kidman, Meg Ryan.

### **My Appeal:**

- I could point to this growing trend today and charge you to imitate it. But, as Russell Moore (President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission) says, "Without the theological aspect, the emphasis on adoption too easily is seen as mere charity" (*Adopted for Life*, 18).
- More than that, the increasing secularization of our culture does not favor adoption. If Darwinian naturalism and evolution is true, then adoption makes little sense.
- Richard Dawkins (a leading atheist who wrote *The God Delusion* in 2006; quotes from *The Selfish Gene*)
  - "In most cases we should probably regard adoption, however touching it may seem, as a misfiring of a built-in rule. This is because the generous female is doing her own genes no good by caring for the orphan. She is wasting time and energy which she could be investing in the lives of her own kin, particularly future children of her own." Adoption is "a double whammy. Not only do you reduce, or at least fail to increase, your own reproductive success, but you improve someone else's."
- If what Galatians 4:1-7 says is true about God, Jesus, and this world, then that changes everything, especially how you view adoption.

**The Point: We should care for orphans as a way to display God's adoption of us through the redemption found in Christ.**

The Plan: We're first going to walk through Galatians 4:1-7 laying a biblical foundation of adoption and then we're going to draw out some implications for how we can participate in adoption.

**Read Galatians 3:25-29 and 4:1-7.**

### **I. We all once were slaves (4:1-3).**

**Let me get something out of the way: the use of masculine "sons."**

- Do some of you women stumble over this? Why we shouldn't translate this "sons and daughters."
- In the culture of NT, adopted daughters didn't have the same rights as adopted sons. So, if the translation would've been, "sons and daughters," it wouldn't have meant as much. When you hear you are "sons," hear you are bumped up, not relegated down. It's an honor to you in this analogy to be included as sons. I'm fine, though, with talking about daughters of God (Gal. 3:28).

**Describe the analogy (4:1-2).**

- Paul describes a situation where there is a boy in a home of wealth who is legally the heir of the family estate, but he's still a minor who lives under the rules very much like a slave. He has "guardians and managers" who supervise him until the "date set by his father."
- The main point: this child has no legal rights at all, and this condition, is no different from being a slave.

**Describe the comparison: “In the same way...” (4:3).**

- When they were under the law, their “guardian” (3:24), they were no different than a slave.
- In fact, they were slaves to “the elementary principles of the world.” This is a summary of Paul’s argument in 3:23-25.
  - This phrase is found only four times in Paul (Gal. 4:3, 9; Col. 2:8, 20).
  - It has to be associated in some way with being “under the law” (3:23), “under a guardian” (3:24-25) and under “guardians and managers” (4:1-2).
  - Meaning: “it was the Mosaic law in its condemnatory and supervisory functions that comprised the Jews’ ‘basic principles’ of religion” (Richard Longenecker, 166).
  - Later in 4:8-9, it was the paganism and cultic rituals of the Gentiles that made the ‘basic principles’ of religion.
- We were slaves to sin (see 3:21-22).

**God adopted us from a very bad situation**

- None of us were desirable or likely candidates for God’s grace (see Deut. 7:6-9). We were ugly, evil, and rebellious. We were enemies of God. We were “by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind” (Eph. 2:3).

Paul is preparing us to see that God is the primary actor in the drama of salvation. He is the Father who sets the dates of redemption.

**II. Jesus became a Servant so that we might become Sons (4:4-5).**

**The time of the Son’s coming:**

- Jesus is the culmination and focus of all of God’s redemptive activity (fulfilling myriads of OT promises and prophecies). World history is even divided by the coming of Christ (B.C & A.D.).
- Conditions were ripe for the coming of Jesus:
  - *Pax Romana*: A period of relative peace and stability enabled the spread of the gospel.
  - Roman Roads: “All roads lead to Rome.” This provided for relatively easy travel and paved the way for the spread of the gospel all the way to Rome (Acts 28:14-31).
  - Greek Language: Greek was the language of commerce throughout the Roman Empire. This provided a universal vehicle for the spread of the gospel. The OT was even translated into Greek and the NT was written in Greek.
  - Jewish Messianic Expectations: various strands of first-century Judaism all sustained a vibrant hope for a Messiah.

**The status of the Son:**

- “God sent his Son...”
  - Implicit in these words are divine intentionality and eternal deity. God didn’t send a substitute, he came himself (Heb. 1:1-3).
- “Born of woman”
  - Jesus was also a human experiencing all of the fears, trials, and temptations that are common to man, yet he was without sin (Heb. 4:15).
- “Born under the law”
  - Jesus wasn’t just a man, he was a Jewish man, circumcised on the eighth day, attended the synagogue, and faithfully fulfilled all of the demands of the law (refer to Gal. 3:13).

### **The purpose and result of the Son's coming:**

- Paul brought together both the person of Christ and the work of Christ.
- God sent Christ to accomplish redemption. His sacrificial death was the purchase price of our redemption (Gal. 3:13). This is the heart of the gospel. As a result of Jesus' life and death, we are now justified through faith. While justification is glorious, it gets even better.
- The result of this redemption is adoption.
  - J. I. Packer argues that "[Adoption] is the highest privilege that the gospel offers: higher even than justification" (J. I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 206). He continues, "Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is a greater" (Packer, *Knowing God*, 207). In fact, Packer says that if he had to sum up the message of the NT in three words, his proposal would be "adoption through propitiation" (Packer, *Knowing God*, 214; see Rom. 5:8; 1 John 3:1).
  - If this is true, then as Packer goes on to note, "the entire Christian life has to be understood in terms of [adoption]" (Packer, *Knowing God*, 209).
- How do you receive adoption as sons?
  - "for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith" (Gal. 3:26).
  - "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13).

### **III. We are now children and heirs (4:6-7).**

- You are now heirs with Christ (see also Rom. 8:14-17).
- Paul has now moved from Christology to Soteriology to Pneumatology.
- God doesn't leave us in a condition of aliens when he adopts us. Rather, he pours out his Spirit into our hearts to give us the experience of being embraced in the family. The Spirit is the sign and pledge of our adoption. The Spirit is the way we experience this reality: intimacy, access, assurance, and confidence. We now cry out in such an intimate way, "Abba, Father!"
- We have now obtained an inheritance that nothing can compare to. What's God's is ours.
- There is therefore no need for them to be circumcised or to seek the favor of God by keeping the works of the law, they were already accepted and adopted as children.

### **God's Adoption is the Paradigm for our Participation in Adoption**

- Now that we have come to know the Father of the fatherless, he commands us to bring justice to the fatherless.

*"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit **orphans** and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."* (James 1:27)

Here are four truths about God's adoption that we can apply to our own pursuit of adoption.

#### **1. Adoption (and Orphan Care) is often from very bad situations**

- I'll be honest, kids are cute and can suck you in. But don't pursue adoption because a child seems irresistibly cute. Adoptions don't just come from nice, healthy, and safe situations. They're often from bad situations because of a mother's unhealthy lifestyle, poor nutrition, and poor orphanage conditions. There are numerous special needs kids that need to be adopted. In fact, in some countries, special needs kids are the only ones eligible for adoption.
- When you go out of your way to adopt a child, especially a child with great needs, it's a picture of the gospel because God chose what is foolish, weak, low and despised (1 Cor. 1:26-28).

## 2. Adoption (and Orphan Care) is not a backup plan.

- Having children by birth and adopting children are both uniquely precious. You may choose to adopt sequentially second, but it doesn't have to be secondary (Eph. 1:4-6; Rev. 21:6-7).
- Embrace adoption, not as a second-rate option, but as one of two good options.
  - Some of you have struggled with infertility and the sadness you feel is normal. God delights in fruitfulness and your barrenness is one of the tragic results of the Fall. Continue to pray to God and ask boldly for him to give life to your womb. But know this, adoption is not a second tier solution. It can be plan A for you and be glorious.
- We all need to ask God to search our hearts and expose any sin or weaknesses that could hold us back from adopting.
- Wrestle with this tough question: "Do you want most of all to be parents, or do you want most of all to be conservators of your genetic material?" (Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life*, 88).
- When you show through orphan care and adoption, that it's not a backup plan, you point people to gospel, the plan of God from the beginning to make slaves of sin sons of God.

## 3. Adoption (and Orphan Care) is costly!

- Orphan Care is Costly for Individuals
  - **Financially**, most adoptions are costly and require great sacrifice (while foster care adoptions are free, domestic and international are \$30,000+). Your spending priorities will need to change.
    - What spending practices are you willing to sacrifice? What financial dreams are you willing to let go?
    - One of the first major steps we took two years ago was to get on top of our financial situation (living on a budget). In fact, this could be a reason that keeps you from being approved to adopt (I'm not saying you have to be rich, but you do have to be responsible).
    - There's hope: There are resources available to help you adopt (grants, tax-credits, people).
  - **Emotionally**, adoption costs time and stress for the rest of your life
- Orphan Care is Costly for a Church
  - If a culture of orphan care is embraced at RHC, we will face the following issues:
    - What about the three-year-old who knows words you don't even know?
    - What about the deaf chinese girl, the handicap young boy, and the autistic child that needs one-on-one attention?
    - What about the kid who's been in the foster care system since birth and has never had a stable home?
  - We can't view families with special needs as burdens. We can't respond with grumbling that these kids are "too much extra hassle." We need to reach out to them and be honored that we have the opportunity to serve them.
    - I guarantee you that there are numerous special needs kids in Greater Boston who don't go to church on Sundays because they think that they're a burden.
    - We talk about being a church where everyone is accepted (3:28), what about these kids and families?
  - Who's willing to give one on one attention to an autistic kid in TS on Sundays?
  - How can we make room at RHC for the special needs kid?
- When you sacrifice to care for an orphan, the glory of God is magnified and shines brightly.

#### 4. Adoption brings the full rights of being children and heirs

- Adoption not only involves a legal standing as a child, but a very personal and intimate relationship. There should be deep, personal, and spiritual bonds developed with our kids.
- There is also no distinction in our family between biological children and adopted children. They are all equally heirs of our inheritance and they will always be our children. We give children a forever home.

#### How can you care for orphans?

- “Adoption is not for everyone, but caring for orphans is for everyone” (Johnny Carr, *Orphan Justice*, 19).
- Some are called to adopt or do foster care.
  - Adoption can seem very overwhelming and you probably have numerous questions (Domestic or International, Open or Closed Adoption, Boy or Girl, Newborn or Older Child, One Child or Siblings, Does Race Matter?, Healthy or Special Needs).
  - Go talk with someone today (reference the back table).
- Some are called to support in a sacrificial way (money, time, serving, resources).
- Some may be called to help organize fundraisers for adopting families.
- We can all pray.
- What’s one action step you can take and implement within the next year?

What can we say to a culture that views kids as a burden and in the way?

- “Go out of your way to add kids to your life! If you make a great effort to add a child to your life, you are making an unbelievable counter-cultural statement” (John Piper). What if a mighty battalion of Christian parents would open their hearts and homes to unwanted infants and orphans here in Greater Boston and around the world, God’s glory in the gospel would be magnified. Many camped out days in cold weather to get in line to see Game 6, will you get in line today to take a next step to magnify God’s glory through adoption and provide an orphan a forever home. The highest privilege of the gospel is adoption.