Becoming a Child of God: Biblical Reflections on the Doctrine of Adoption

Introduction:
Illustration: The Orphan Trains

My topic this morning is Becoming a Child of God: Biblical Reflections on the Doctrine of Adoption

It is not my intention to persuade anyone to adopt a child, but I do desire to share with you this morning what God's word says about our special relationship with Him through the work of spiritual adoption. I have come to this study with a sharpened interest due to the process of bible study, ministry, and exposure my wife and I have had regarding the special needs of orphans and our decision to adopt a daughter from China. As a matter of fact, this doctrine is much on my mind since we have been told that we will be receiving a referral from China next week. Our referral will introduce us to our daughter by way of a picture and a medical profile. Once we receive this we will be able to travel and pick her up within the next month.

God's word employs adoption to help us understand more clearly the unique work He does through the gospel.

Definition of the Doctrine of Adoption
Theologians have defined this as the doctrine of adoption. The reformers celebrated this doctrine. Their thoughts are reflected in both the Westminster Catechism and Heidelberg Catechism.

Westminster Catechism

All those that are justified, God vouchsafes, in and for His only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have His name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry, Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by Him as by a Father: yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption; and inherit the promises, as heirs of everlasting salvation.

Heidelberg Catechism

. . . leads us to express our gratitude to God for His "amazing grace". . . "by adoption we become members of God's family". . . "adoption as the apex of privilege."
Anthony Hoekema defines adoption

... that we might be legally adopted by God as his children, thus receiving all the rights involved in that sonship. The reception of this sonship is accompanied by the reception of the Holy Spirit, who applies to our hearts and lives the redemption Christ earned for us. That Spirit not only enables us to accept our sonship by faith, but also to give expression to it by addressing God as our Father. And because we have now been adopted by God as his sons and daughters, we have also become heirs of God, entitled to all the privileges and benefits of that sonship. How inexpressibly rich we are in Christ!

J.I. Packer writes

New Testament believers deal with God as their Father. `Father' is the name by which they call Him. `Father' has now become His covenant name -- for the covenant which binds Him to His people now stands revealed as a family covenant. Christians are His children, His own sons and heirs.

Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into His family and fellowship, and establishes us as His children and heirs. 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.

Reflections on adoption from the Old Testament:

Moses
Exodus 2:10

Esther
Esther 2:7,15

Illustration: Nepal, Read "A Girl's Life" this story plays out thousands of times a day in India, Singapore, the Philippines, Africa

What an amazing change is made in one's life through the grace filled work of adoption. Lisa and I were talking last week about what a change God has sovereignly ordained for our little girl. We are trying to imagine what the life of an un-adopted little girl would be in China. We hope to give her a new life, where the gospel is revealed to her and she will grow in the knowledge and one day service of the Lord.

Isn't this exactly how it is for us a God's adopted children. Imagine where you could be if he did not bring you into His family. God is takes our lives and redeems them from despair and hopelessness and sets our futures before us as new opportunities to live lives of impact filled with His blessings.
The Nation of Israel
Adoption in the ancient world was the making of slave's legal heirs. This practice was regulated by code in the laws of Babylon, Nuzi, and Ugarit. We see this in Proverbs 17:2, 19:10, 29:21.

Since Israel had no myth of descent from the gods as surrounding cultures did, adoption was the obvious category into which the fell. When they were delivered from slavery and identified as God's chosen nation, the concept of adoption was consistent with action.

Texts which refer to the new status of Israel:
Exodus 4:22,23
Numbers 6:27
Deuteronomy 14:1
Deuteronomy 27:9
Deuteronomy 32:5
Isaiah 43:6
Jeremiah 3:19
Hosea 1:9
Hosea 11:1

Ezekiel 16:1-6
This chapter is a very graphic and vivid portrayal of Israel's idolatry under the imagery of a Bride, rescued from exposure as an infant, who became the wife of her benefactor, who made her a queen, and lavished upon her silks and sealskins, and every beautiful thing; who then made herself a prostitute to every man who passed by... (Halley's Bible Handbook, p. 328)

Romans 9:4

The law and Orphans
God wanted His redemptive plan to be modeled for the world.

Reflections on Adoption from the New Testament:

Key Text: Romans 8:12-17

In the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, adoption was common, particularly among the upper class where it was often used to gain political and/or economic advantage. Several Roman emperors, for example, adopted men who were not blood relatives for the purpose of conferring upon them certain authority and other privileges.

The law of adoption held as its basic premise that a father had near absolute legal authority over his child (patria potestas). That authority extended to the power of life and death and continued as long as the father was alive, no matter the age of the child. Thus children were viewed in law as the possession of and under the absolute power of the father.

Because of the seriousness of this parental authority, adoption was a significant and solemn legal transaction. As was often the case, a Roman man of wealth and prominence
might want to adopt a young man in order to elevate that young man to a position of prominence. But for that to happen, the absolute authority and power of the birth father over the son had to be transferred to the adoptive father. This transference occurred symbolically in an impressive two-part ceremony of adoptio. During the course of adoptio, the birth father would first symbolically sell and then buy his son back two times, but after selling him a third time he would not buy him back—this symbolized the breaking of the authority and ownership rights of the birth father. In the second step, the adopting father went to a Roman magistrate and presented the legal case for the transference of the rights of the son from his birth father to the adopting father. With that, the adoption was complete.

We thus learn that Roman adoption did not confer an inferior form of sonship. Rather, an adopted son had all the rights and privileges of a natural-born son. It is this legal-cultural view of adoption, along with the Old Testament ideas of fatherhood and sonship, that seem to be in Paul’s view when he picks up adoption as a metaphor to illuminate salvation.

(Taken from the text of a sermon by Ted Johnston)

Adoption is the basis of our Salvation:
1. God chose us (Eph 1:3-5)
2. God legally changed our status (Jn 1:12-13)
3. God secures us (Col 1:13,14)

Adoption is the basis of our relationship with Christ:
1. He is the first born
2. He is the begotten Son (Jn 3:16)
   Begotten = sharing the very nature of God, the son of promise
   Adopted = transformed into the image of God
3. We are fellow heirs with Christ (Gal 4:7)
4. We are called brothers
5. We share in Christ's sufferings (Ro 8:17)
6. We are adopted through faith in Christ (Ga 3:26)

Adoption is the basis of our relationship with God:
1. We know Him as our Father
2. We are called the children of God
3. He disciplines us as children (Hb 12:5-10)

Adoption is the basis of our relationship with the Spirit:
1. The Spirit enables us to recognize God as father (Rm 8:14)
2. The Spirit is the agent of our adoption (Jn 3:5,6)
3. The Spirit enables us to be transformed into the image of God (Ga 4:6)
   (loving and serving others as Christ did)
4. The Spirit enables us to have assurance of our salvation (Rm 8:15-16)

Adoption is the basis of Christian conduct:
1. We are to imitate our Father (Mt 5:44-45,48)
2. We are to glorify our Father (Mt 5:16; 6:9)
3. We are to please our Father (Mt 6:1)
Adoption is the basis of Christian prayer
1. We pray to our Father
2. We pray with boldness (Rm 8:15, Hb 4:16)
2. We receive answers from our Father

Adoption is the basis of Christian hope
1. We will be known by a new name (Rev 3:12)
2. We will enter our Father's presence
3. We will join those who have been adopted before us
4. We will be given an inheritance (Eph 1:11, I Pt 1:3ff.)

Further implications for Living as those who have been Adopted
Rest. To be home, knowing to whom you belong.

Security. We now understand the great grace of unconditional love.

Provision. A father knows best how to give good gifts to His children. We are heirs of His grace, inheritors of all that He possesses.

Faith. I will never leave you or forsake you has particular meaning to an orphan.

Hope. The future realization of a completed adoption, abiding for eternity in our Father's presence.

Personal testimony
One of the things that has impacted Lisa and I the most as we have been introduced to the world of adoption is a new understanding of God's providence in election. Many couples who are infertile are tempted to view adoption as a second best attempt at building a family. The literature of our adoption agency lovingly confronted this unbiblical way of thinking. They clearly articulated that not only is adoption the very model God employed to describe our redemption and therefore should never be understood as inferior, but believing God's promises that He has ordained all of life, means that before the creation of the world He ordained that a little girl would be born one day in China under difficult circumstances. He ordained that He would move in our hearts to make us chose to adopt a little girl from china. Therefore, adoption is the uniting a family that God created and intended from eternity past. Adoption can not be understood as inferior but providential.

God's providential work is mysterious, but never inferior. It is not second best, it's God's plan. He ahs ordained for you and I who have been reconciled trough the work of Christ to be brought into His family. And one day, just as we will take our daughter up in our arms, we will know the embrace of God Himself.

May we always live with a since of how much our Father loves us.
I John 3:1
"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the sons of God! And that is what we are!"

**Song: I'm a Child of the King**

**A Child of the King**

My father is rich in houses and lands;
He holdeth the wealth of the world in His hands!
Of rubies and diamonds, of silver and gold,
His coffers are full – He has riches untold!

Chorus:
I'm a child of the King!
A child of the King!
With Jesus, my Savior, I'm a child of the King!

I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice and an alien by birth!
**But I've been adopted;** my name’s written down.
I'm heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown!