

Adoption as Sons 1-27-02

Romans 8:13-23

I'm borrowing again from DeVern F. Fromke's book *The Ultimate Intention*. The clear and eloquent explanation of "Sonship" in chapter 23 is the background for this message. Behind that chapter is the revelation of the Holy Spirit to the Apostle Paul. Through this parallel in Greek culture we see God's intention for us.

From Paul's letters to the churches we read of his goal of presenting every man mature, or full-grown, in Christ. (Col 1:28) Through understanding the culture in the time and terms that Paul used in regards to this goal, we come to a clearer picture than first meets the eye. It revolves around these terms: child, adoption, and sonship. But first, let us get the perspective of someone that lived in the culture of that time. What did these terms mean to them?

When we think of adoption, we think of taking a child from another family and making them a part of our own. In Eastern lands of that day, the idea of adoption was very different. A Greek or Roman would never consider adopting a child outside of their family. They only adopted their own children. When the child was born – they are, of course, loved dearly, but a father of noble birth would take his child and entrust him to a servant for their tutelage. The servant was, more than likely, a captive of an advanced and educated culture. His learning and culture made him a respected and valued servant. The job of this tutor, or child trainer, was to infuse the child, not only with the education of sciences and skills, but to teach the child their father's ways, purposes, and spirit.

During this time the child is no more important in the household than a servant, even though he is heir. (Gal 4:1) He is subservient to the instructor and must obey him. It does not mean his parents love him any less. That is just the position he holds in the household.

Once the child's education was deemed complete, (somewhere between 14 and 16 years of age) he is considered a mature son. The father will pick a day in which he will adopt him, present him to society, and consider him a partner. This is the day of his adoption. The child longs for this day when his position will change, when he will participate in the affairs of his father. We still have a shadow of this in the Jewish *bar mitzvah*.

The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. Through God's laws we see our need of Christ to rescue us from our condition. Once we come to Christ we are made right with God and receive the righteousness He lived in our place. Then, in this life we come under a new Instructor, instead of the law, which led to death, we have the Spirit. He instructs us in Life. See Galatians 4 and 5. This is not earning salvation, but learning to live out the new Life we have already received.

Understanding this, let us look again at a portion of Scripture you have probably heard many times, Romans 8:13-23 (NIV). ¹³ *For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death (present active tense) the misdeeds of the body, you will live,*¹⁴ *because those who are led ('led' in Greek as a man leads an animal by a rope) by the Spirit of God are sons of God*¹⁵ *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (or adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*¹⁶ *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*¹⁷ *Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*¹⁸ *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*¹⁹ *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. (manifest, appearing)* ²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope*²¹ *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption (releasing effected by payment of ransom) of our bodies.*

In this passage, we see the steps the Lord is taking us through, and realize they are the reality of what adoption in Paul's day was just a type of. It begins when we become children, when we are born into the family of God. We respond to the Holy Spirit and repent of our sins, and find our hearts filled with new Life. We become spiritual babies. We receive the Spirit of sonship and so we cry, "Daddy, Papa!" The old has gone and we are new creatures in Christ. Then we are placed under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that when the Spirit came, He would teach them all things. Do you see the picture there of the pedagogue? The Spirit teaches us to act in the ways, purposes, and spirit of our Father. You could say He teaches us to yield to the Life of Christ in us. Conviction is the Holy Spirit teaching us that we have acted in a way that is different from our Father's way.

Jesus, as our example, went through a similar process. *Unto us a child was born.* He learned from the things He suffered and was prepared for the day He was to be proclaimed as Son. That happened at the beginning of His ministry when He came up out of the water – from the baptism by John. The Father said, "This is my beloved Son!" Then the participation with the Father, a sharing of His ministry in the world, began in public. *Unto us a Son was given.* (Isaiah 9:6)

Some submit to the teaching and instruction of the Spirit and grow quickly. Many of us refuse to submit, demand our rights as sons, and prolong the day of our coming out. The Father does not want to declare a spoiled child as a son that is supposed to be in His image, His purposes, and share in His Spirit. Instead, He is longing for sons imbibed with His Spirit and reflecting His character. Hebrews 12 tells us of the discipline the Father brings our way. Heb 12:10-11 (NIV)¹⁰ *Our*

fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The goal is to share in His holiness, and so we undergo this life of training, of discipline, of teaching. We have the best possible Teacher. We could go on for weeks about His training and what it is producing – but let us move on toward the next step – adoption. “The change from child to son is not of relationship but of position... A child is one born of God; a son is one taught of God. A child has God’s nature; a son has God’s character.” R.B. Jones

The training is completed in the heavenly realms when we see Him. There is a sense in Scripture in which we are placed as sons now because of Christ in us. I am referring to full-sonship of Romans 8:23 that happens when we are transformed. Some claim they have finished it in this life. If the Apostle Paul did not claim to have attained, perhaps they should think again.

Romans 8:15-17 (NIV)¹⁵ *For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."*¹⁶ *The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*

¹⁷ *Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

The Spirit has come into our lives and we recognize God as our Father. We are no longer afraid of being a slave of the fear of death. The Spirit, our Teacher, confirms that we are His children and heirs. Jesus learned through the things He suffered, and we too will be taught by suffering – with the result of sharing His glory. Sharing in His holiness and sharing in His glory are inseparable things.

Romans 8:19-22 (NIV)¹⁹ *The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.*²⁰ *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope*²¹ *that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.*²² *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

The creation, all nature, is waiting for our coming out. When created things see our adoption complete, then decay and death and the curse of sin will be lifted from creation. And the next verse tells us when that will happen.

Romans 8:23 (NIV)²³ *Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

We are adopted when our bodies are transformed, redeemed. The robes we wear now are tattered and wearing out and we anxiously await our being clothed from heaven. 2 Cor 5:2-5 (NIV)² *Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,*³ *because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked.*⁴ *For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*⁵ *Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.*

We can't live as sons of God in these temporal houses and so God will transform them. Then as one glorious body, Christ is revealed to the world. Yes, every man will receive his own reward, according to his own labor, but the world will see Jesus. The glory goes to Jesus! Not you! Not me! We are His body. Many people get excited about the glory they, personally, will receive, but this is a corporate experience and a corporate coming out. This is the *parousia*, the unveiling! When we realize this, we have a heart for seeing all of the people of God mature in Him. That is the heart of the Apostle Paul. He had this revelation and understood it is for all in Christ. The maturing believer has his focus shift from his own development to that of others in the body. Of course he continues to grow and be disciplined, but his focal concern is turned away from self and toward others. The day we are presented, the world of creation will heave a great sigh of relief for the curse is about to be lifted.

Romans 8:29-30 (NIV)²⁹ *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*³⁰ *And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.*

We are in the process of being conformed right now under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit. There will be a great and wonderful day of presentation to the world. And then, it begins; we share in His throne. The government will be upon His shoulders and He will share it with us. We will be a temple unto His glory. We get excited about all He has planned for us but let us not forget the ultimate intention is for all to live unto the glory of God.

In that little passage in Romans we see the whole plan. First we receive and walk in the Spirit. Next, the Spirit of adoption comes as our Teacher. Then we await the unveiling or manifestation of the sons of God. And then we receive our adoption as sons, our heavenly house from above, a body that can share His glory, His holiness.

When we began, He did everything for us. As we mature, He begins to work through us. When we graduate, it will be together as a class. Are you yielding to the Holy Spirit day by day, listening and obeying His instruction? We have the Firstfruits of the Spirit. We have Him, but how much does He have of us? The Spirit was poured out without measure upon Jesus. How much have you been willing to receive? Are you being a good student?

What could be more wonderful than to realize that we have been predestined "unto the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ to Himself"? (Ephesians 1:5)