

**3. Adoption changes the legal status of the child.** *When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”* (Gal. 4:4-6).

There were legal realities for God to overcome; God’s own justice and law demanded that we be punished and excluded from God’s presence for our sins. But God’s great love for us required that God find a way to show both fairness and grace. This God did by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Adoption requires a lot of paperwork and legal expertise; and usually the legal wrangling is done by adults on behalf of a child. Adoption means formally acknowledging the change of a situation, the change of a name, and the change of a relationship. With the cross of Christ, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves: God cut through the red tape, changed our situation, and God granted us a new name and a new status. Any debt to sin and any prior claim on our lives are nullified, and we now belong completely to God.

**4. Adoption is blessed with God’s pouring out a Spirit of kinship.** *Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”* (Gal. 4:6). In his letter to the Romans, Paul says something similar: *You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons and daughters, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God* (Rom. 8:15-16). God does not leave us in the condition of aliens when God adopts us. God does not leave us with no feelings of acceptance and love. Rather, God pours God’s Spirit into our hearts to give us the experience of being embraced in the family.

What is remarkable about these two texts is the term *Abba*. It’s actually an Aramaic word, the same word Jesus used when speaking of his Father. It’s a decidedly personal term, an endearing form of address. No one in Jewish culture would refer to God in such an informal manner, and it stunned the disciples. But it’s the perfect word for one who has an intimate relationship with a parent. Therefore, in adopting us, God gives us the very Spirit of his Son which allows us to feel the affections of belonging to the very family of God.

Adoptive parents do not just begin to love adopted children because the law says they can. Adopted children do not *infer* that they are our children by checking out the adoption papers.

A spirit pervades the relationship that bears witness to this new reality. Like the other children in the family, adoptive children call their adoptive parents “Mom” and “Dad.” Through the Spirit of God, a new kinship develops so that we find ourselves calling on God from a heart of deep conviction, “Abba, Father.”

**5. Adoption is marked by transformation through the Spirit.** *All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God* (Rom. 8:14). Adoption may require removing a child from an unhealthy environment or a broken family and placing them in a healthy environment with a stable family. The goal and the hope is that the child will grow and thrive and learn how to live well. Being adopted into God’s family means changing our ways, living better than we did before, and seeking God’s kingdom first. Fortunately, God does not leave us without help as we move into this new family; God’s Spirit leads us forward. The Spirit of God is the part of God that lives and remains with us throughout our life. This Spirit helps us live into the transformation wrought in our life by our adoption as children of God.

**6. Adoption brings us the rights and privileges of being God’s heirs.** *Because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a child, and if a child, then also an heir, through God* (Gal. 4:6-7). God never intended any of us to be orphans. God created all of creation to live together in peace and harmony. But sometimes human situations leave us parentless and adrift. Sometimes our own sinfulness or stubbornness cuts us off from important relationships. With the sending of Jesus, God reestablished contact and began to rebuild relationships with us. God initiated this redemption. God started the adoption process. With Jesus as our broker and the Spirit of God as our advocate, God completed the adoption, brought us into the family, with all the rights and privileges as heirs to God’s kingdom.

Now the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, *then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ* (Rom. 8:16-17). Galatians 4:7 says we are heirs “through God” and Romans 8:17 says we are heirs “of God.” In Galatians, the context is the promise of Abraham — through God who sent Jesus to redeem us, we are heirs with Abraham of his inheritance, namely the world (Rom. 4:13). But in Romans 8:17, the context is that we, with Christ, are heirs of all that God has, of everything that is: *All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s* (1 Cor. 3:21). We are not a lesser adoptive class - we will inherit the whole kingdom as heirs, as full sons and daughters - and all will inherit together.

**7. Adoption was seriously and gloriously planned by God for us.** Adoption was not God's Plan B. And Plan A was not lots of children who never sinned and never needed to be redeemed. Plan A was creation, fall, redemption, and adoption so that the full range of God's glory and mercy and grace could be known by God's adopted children. God chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before God. In love, God predestined us for adoption as sons and daughters through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of God's will. Adoption was not God's second and we are not in second place; our adoption was planned from the very beginning because God wanted us to be part of the family.

So, we are the adopted sons and daughters of God: chosen by God; obtained at great cost; full members of the family and heirs to the kingdom; transformed by God's Spirit; and all as part of God's great plan from the very beginning.

Prayer: Generous and Divine Trinity, we give thanks for the presence of our holy brothers and sisters. We give thanks that you created the world, though it turned from your ways. We give thanks that you began a people to bless this world, though it did not always bless. We give thanks, with greatest reverence, for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ, who indeed blessed the world. In him, we are all adopted children of God. We are brought into the divine redemption, which now subsists in each embrace, each extension of love, each sacrament, each act of service. In Christ, the Son of God, there is neither adoptive, nor natural parents or children. We are all born again in the Spirit of God. This Spirit redeems us with the substance of faith, hope, and love. May we, your children, be blessed by the mysterious presence, mercy, and grace of the Trinity: all praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sources:

- John Piper, "Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel," sermon on <http://www.desiringgod.org>. Site visited July 11, 2016.
- Christina Romo quote on <http://www.adoptionassociates.net>.

## Adoption: The Heart of the Gospel

Sunday, July 17, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Galatians 4:1-7 and Romans 8:14-17

I am an adopted child; I was adopted at six weeks old. My adoptive parents raised me because my birth parents could not. Adoption is undertaking to raise someone else's child as your own, often taking them out of a bad situation and giving them a fuller, richer life. Christina Romo, another adopted child, said it best: "My birth mother brought me into this world, but it was my adoptive parents who gave me life." This is exactly what the apostle Paul wants to convey to us in Galatians 4: in Christ Jesus we are all adopted as sons and daughters of God, and by adoption granted a newer, richer life.

In Galatians 4, the apostle Paul presents seven ideas about God's adoption process. These are important for us to ponder so that we might fully understand what God has done by adopting us through Jesus Christ.

**1. God chooses us.** The deepest and strongest foundation of adoption is located not in the act of humans adopting humans, but in God adopting humans. This idea is the very heart of our gospel, and Galatians 4:4-5 is as central a gospel statement as there is: *But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.* God chooses us to be God's sons and daughters.

**2. Adoption was costly for God.** *When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons* (Gal. 4:4-5). To "redeem" in its original Greek sense means to obtain or to set free by paying a price. What was the price that God paid for our liberation and adoption? Paul tells us back in chapter 3: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us — for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'* (Gal. 3:13). Our adoption cost God the price of a Son's life. We are the children of God because Christ died and rose again to claim us. We are considered worthy because the One who is truly worthy died in our place to set us free from sin, and make us alive again.