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# Heirs With Christ: The Glories of Adoption

**John 1:12**

*Devon Berry*

**Introduction** *We have enough in us to move God to correct us, but nothing to move him to adopt us, therefore exalt free grace, begin the work of angels here; bless him with your praises who hath blessed you in making you his sons and daughters<sup>1</sup>.*

When Beth and I got married the big plan was for me to reach my educational goals and then for us to start a family. Around 2004 we were less than a year out from me completing my degree and we began trying to have children. That year came and went. I graduated in the June of 2005 and we kept trying. 2005 was quickly moving past us and we were beginning to wonder if there might be something wrong. So, Beth got some tests and I got some tests. I think it is safe to say that we both thought that we would either find no problems and that we were just impatient or that there was a problem but that it could be easily fixed. The tests turned up nothing definitive. We decided to wait awhile before doing anything else. The word “infertility” crept into our dialogue.

Later in 2006 we decided to return to the medical system for help. Beth got some more tests, I got some more tests, Beth got some more tests, I was absolutely done with tests, and Beth got some more tests, exploratory surgery, and a few rounds of drugs (prescribed!). By 2007 Beth was becoming deeply discouraged and I was wondering what an entire marriage without children would look like. Many of you have heard Beth’s story of God’s faithfulness to her. We had hit the end of the line in terms of medical treatments and solutions we were willing to undertake. Infertility was no longer a term we discussed, it was a label we wore.

By the spring of 2008 we were talking about adoption – but we were a long way from being on the same page. Beth would be able to give you dates, times, and details of how things were unfolding. As for me, I can hardly remember anything... unless it is related to my work (chromosomal disorder). That is why I remember very well this one conversation that was, in retrospect, somewhat of a watershed for us. We were together on one of my work trips and we were sitting in a bar somewhere near Duke University. The upshot of the conversation was that we could not find any good or biblical reason to not adopt (and, in contrast, there were many good reasons to adopt).

From that point on we began a slow warm-up to adoption. Eventually, in the fall of 2008, we began getting a little more intentional. I had asked Beth to go to the Desiring God website to just see what they had on adoption. In mid-October, she did, and she discovered that in two weeks there was going to be the first ever Together for Adoption Conference in South Carolina. She shared this with the Coopers, our trustworthy sojourners, and they

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, London: A. Fullarton, 1845

promptly informed us that we should go and that they would come with us. That sealed the deal for us and two weeks later we were off.

At that conference, all of our questions were answered and for us, our dilemma was finally and fully resolved. We left that conference with both a vision for adoption in the church and a desire to adopt our own children. For any of you who know us, what came next was very predictable; we started getting books on adoption. Yes, we read about how to do everything – we'd read about how to put our socks on if we had time. Both Christian and secular authors further developed our understanding and desire to adopt. What we did not know is that very close to the time Beth sat down at the computer and found out about the adoption conference, Reuben was conceived.

As soon as we returned home in early-November, we selected an adoption agency and began the process of being "checked out" by the state. There is a very long application exploring everything from your upbringing to your financial condition to your legal history to your plans for discipline to how often you vacuum. You get to see the doctor for a physical, the fire marshal for an inspection, and the social worker for a home visit. By February of 2009 our personal lives had been thoroughly inspected and we finally had our home study submitted.

We began working on our personal commercial, or what is otherwise known as your profile book. When private adoptions take place through agencies, the process is, sadly, very marketized. Generally, a mother wishing to make an adoption plan for her child will be put in touch with an agency. Upon doing so, she will receive a stack of profile books from 10-20 families. She will look through these books and simply make a decision about who she wants to allow her child to be adopted by. She may or may not choose to interview the adoptive parents. By April we had this wrapped up and submitted.

What came next was a series of false starts. Some of you will remember that one time we almost came home with twins – each about the size of a bread loaf. Four months came and went. It was now July of 2009, we were a full 5 years into this family building odyssey. We were laying in hammocks just behind a Marriott Resort in Hilton Head that we had price-lined from the road as we were returning from some backpacking in Georgia. Our signal was not good in this location so texts and phone calls were not coming through consistently. I checked the time on my phone and noticed that we had voicemails from the Coopers, texts from the Coopers, and a voicemail from our agency social worker.

So we wandered up to our room where the signal was better to check the messages. The light on our hotel room phone was blinking too. Understand that as I mentioned, we had a number of false starts and every time the agency wanted to show your book they would call you and make sure it was okay. Coopers were listed in our paperwork as our back-up contacts in case we could not be reached. We were pretty sure this was simply news about our book being shown to another couple. We listened to our messages and gave the Coopers a call. They were trying to tell us we were going to have a baby. We were 95% sure that they simply did not understand and they had not been through this and that they did completely get how the process worked, etc. It was just another mother to whom our book was being shown.

We thanked the Coopers and phoned our social worker. To our surprise, but not the Coopers, she told us that we had been selected by a mother and that she was expecting a baby boy in two days – on July 10<sup>th</sup>, my birthday. As you can imagine – we were hyper. The social worker assured us that it was okay to finish our vacation and that we should just simply keep the phone nearby. That is the last we heard from the social worker for three days. We ended our vacation as planned on July 11<sup>th</sup> and began the trip home. We picked out a name on the way home, wondered what was going on, and worked to not get our hopes too high.

Not able to wait any longer, we finally called our social worker up and asked her what had happened. Nothing had happened. Mother was still carrying the child and we should be on standby. On the morning of July 17<sup>th</sup> we had gone to see our adoption lawyer to make sure everything was in order. While sitting in his office we got a call from our social worker letting us know it was time to head to the hospital – the mother would be delivering soon. As you can imagine, this call was exhilarating – plus it probably saved us about \$100 bucks getting us out of the lawyer’s office sooner than expected. We headed to Good Sam hospital in downtown Dayton, were shown to a waiting room, and began what we thought would be a long sit. I’ll never forget the next scene. It had only been two or three hours and I was just getting ready to head out and get some fresh air when a nurse came through the middle of the double swinging doors, perfectly centered, and looked us in the eye and said, Mr. and Mrs. Berry, would you like to meet your son? [Let’s Pray]

## Why a Series on Adoption?

Tonight we begin a very short two-part series on adoption. I’d like to accomplish the following things in these two sermons: (1) Explain and describe the spiritual reality of adoption as revealed in the Bible; (2) Invoke the praise of God in the rejoicing of his people over our spiritual adoption; (3) Cast a kingdom-centered, commissional vision for a church-based commitment to earthly adoption; and finally, (4) introduce the adoption fund.

So why begin with such a long rehearsal of our own adoption story? Two reasons. First, and foremost, in earthly adoption we have the shadow of spiritual adoption. As an author has put it, “Whenever earthly things mirror heavenly realities, a preacher is needed to point from the picture to the thing pictured...<sup>2</sup>” The Bible is full of this kind of talk. For example, in one of the passages we will look at tonight, Paul does this very thing:

*...the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under the guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way, we also...* (Galatians 4:1ff) **[elaborate and connect]**

There is nothing special about *our* adoption story, but there *is* something special about adoption. We could have told the Combs’ story, we could have told the Favors’ story and there are likely many of you who could tell of adoption stories that have touched your life directly or indirectly. There is nothing more special about Reuben than there is any child

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<sup>2</sup> Russell Moore, *Adopted for Life*, p. 170.

regardless of how he or she came into their family. I tell our story simply because I know it best. More importantly, we tell any story of earthly circumstance from the pulpit because it helps point us to the heavenly realities, to the Gospel, and especially, to Christ our Savior. So part of what we will do as we go forward in this series is consider the parallels between earthly adoption and spiritual adoption as a means to more fully appreciating what God has done. In this sense, earthly adoption is simply a picture, a model, a window – it is the coffee table picture book or a youtube video of Alaska’s wilderness. The pictures are beautiful, they give us some idea of what we are in for, they whet our appetite... but, they are nothing like the grandeur of the real thing. The picture book simply informs and excites our affections for the real thing.

The second reason I tell the story of the adoption of our first child is to expose you, first hand, to what we might refer to as a missionary story. All believing parents, and in a slightly unique way, adoptive parents, could be featured in the program with Walid Bitar, Dave Dernlan, Robert Dow, and Mark Fehrman.

These missionaries tell stories of God’s work through them in peoples that were not their own, seeking to make disciples of them, see them baptized, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded us (Matthew 28) by bringing to them the gospel in their native settings. Similarly, adoptive parents tell stories of God’s work through them in children that were not their own, seeking to make disciples of them, see them baptized, and teach them to observe all that Christ has commanded us (Matthew 28) by bringing to them the gospel in their own homes, 24/7, for the duration of their childhood years.

Coming out of our commissional series 2+ years ago, came a kingdom expansion series 2+weeks ago, and now, quite naturally flowing from this stream, an adoption series. We’ll consider this commissional aspect of adoption more in the next sermon.

For tonight, we want to begin our consideration of the grandeur of spiritual adoption itself.

## **A Very Brief Overview of Spiritual Adoption**

As we do with most topical studies at the Chapel, we want to get a running start by considering what the whole of the Bible has to say about a topic – that is, we’ll take a Biblical Theological approach. And, we’ll do it in the flow of the unfolding of God’s plan to bring himself glory through the saving of a people for himself – that is, we’ll consider the redemptive-historical context. Finally, we’ll endeavor to understand spiritual adoption as a planet, so to say, revolving around the sun, our Savior Jesus Christ. Without the sun in place, the planet is nothing, just a cold lifeless rock floating around. Similarly, without Christ, spiritual adoption is nothing but a myth – therefore, we’ll consider the necessity of the Christocentricity of adoption. And, in full disclosure, we’ll do it at a very high and cursory level.

I want to make one brief point as we go forward so that you can hear the Scriptures correctly – spiritual adoption will go by many monikers in the Bible. Remember that our default position spiritually is as children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3), sons of disobedience (Ephesians 2:2, 5:6), and the devil as our father (John 8:42-44). So in contrast, whenever we run

into language that describes God as our *Father*, Christ as our *brother*, ourselves as God's children or heirs or offspring, and other believers as our siblings, we must assume that an adoption has taken place, otherwise, there is no grounds for any of these relationships.

### **Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adoption**

Here is a trick question – for New Covenant believers, where does the Bible begin? It begins with the New Testament – which begins with Christ. It is then through reading the New Testament that we come to understand fully the Old Testament. So let's start with Jesus in Ephesians 1 so that we can understand Jesus in Genesis 1. Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace... (vv. 3ff).*

From the very beginning, before the foundations of the earth in Genesis 1, adoption was in the Father's heart, to be executed by the Son's work, and to be guaranteed by the Spirit's seal. In Genesis 3, the plan is previewed and we could say it is inaugurated in Genesis 12 with Abraham. All Christians, from all time, are children of God – heirs with Christ. But it is true that as with many things in the Old Testament, the reality was hard to see and the promise was not "fully fulfilled." In the Old Testament, we see God mainly as ruler and king living in an authoritative disposition toward his people – though not without love and compassion. We do not see, however, or rarely see, God as father living in a familial relationship with his children. As one author has put it, "Yet the clarity of adoption of Old Testament believers compared to New Testament believers varies as much as 'the light of the stars before that of the sun<sup>3</sup>.'"

Nevertheless the ages-old adoptive intent peeks through in a few places. Let me read to you two passages from the Old Testament. Psalm 103:13 says, "*As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.*" Isaiah 43:6-7 says, "*I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.*"

Even more compelling, however, just like Ephesians 1 are other New Testament passages which reach directly into the Old Testament period and testify to the fatherhood of God. And this brings us to discussing adoption in the context of redemptive history, which is often what the New Testament authors are doing when they discuss adoption.

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<sup>3</sup> Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:447.

## Redemptive History and Spiritual Adoption

There are a number of passages we could consider in the New Testament, but for the sake of time we will go to just one<sup>4</sup>. From Galatians 3:15 through 4:7 we have Paul unfolding redemptive history through a New Covenant lens. From the very beginning of God's work through Christ in saving man, we see that his intent to establish a family created by adoption was in place. But this plan was to unfold over time. Abraham was given a promise, it concerned namely land, people, and blessing. Though Abraham likely did not fully conceive it, his "chief" offspring would be Christ. And his family would be made up of believers who become his offspring when they are placed into Christ through faith. The law intervened during this plan as a God-appointed guardian over his people until the chief offspring, Christ, would come onto the scene to do only what he could do. Paul tells us that, *"...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..."* (4:4-7). With Christ's birth, death, and resurrection all believers are known as offspring of Abraham, sons of God, and heirs of the inheritance.

## The Christocentricity of Adoption

In short, Christ has made the way for our adoption as sons and daughters into God's family. There is little more to say then when we consider the Christ-centeredness of spiritual adoption. Christ came to redeem those who were under law, *so that*, we might receive adoption as sons. Apart from the justifying work of Christ on the cross – our forgiveness of sins and the declaration that we are righteous – there is no adoption by God nor could there ever be for we are in rebellion against God, sons of disobedience.

Even though we are moving quickly, do not think lightly of the importance of understanding that without Christ, there is no adoption. Christ's work is utterly central. If we do forget this then we will quickly find ourselves singing merrily with Alan Jackson: *Here comes a Baptist, here comes a Jew, There goes a Mormon and a Muslim too, I see a Buddhist and a Hindu, I see a Catholic and I see you, We're all God's Children, We're all God's children, We're all God's children, Why can't we be one big happy family?*

Yet Paul says in Galatians 4:26, *"...for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."*

## The New Testament on Spiritual Adoption

We want to wrap up tonight by looking a little more closely at several New Testament passages concerning adoption and making observations that will help us to more deeply appreciate what has transpired in this most precious of spiritual transactions. We will limit ourselves to four observations though many more could be made. Let's start with this sim-

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<sup>4</sup> See also Romans 9:7-8, Galatians 3:23-26, 4:1-7, 28, 31; 1 Peter 3:6

ple definition of spiritual adoption as we make our way forward: *Adoption is an act of God whereby he makes us members of his family*<sup>5</sup>.

### **Through Adoption We are Made Co-Heirs with Christ** (Galatians 4:29, Romans 8:17)

We certainly don't spend enough time thinking about this in the Church – yet it is a predominant theme throughout all of Scripture. John tells us clearly in this gospel that, “...*to all who did receive him he gave the right to become the children of God*” (1:12) and Paul in Romans says, “...*if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...*” (Romans 8:17). Of all that we receive as believers in spiritual adoption, this is probably the one idea that encompasses all the others.

What are we heirs to? Oh the list is very long, but let me mention just a few of the major items. We inherit the Spirit, we inherit the kingdom, we inherit God's people, we inherit heaven, as offspring of Abraham we inherit the world, we inherit the eternal weight of glory, we inherit eternal life, and very best of all, we inherit Christ himself and because we are placed into him, all that God has given him is also ours<sup>6</sup>! In short, anything that is a blessing, it is part of our inheritance. How certain are we to receive these things? Given that we are co-heirs with Christ, God himself would have to deny his only son, Jesus Christ, his inheritance if he were not to make good on ours. To boot, our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and kept in heaven for us<sup>7</sup>.

A number of months ago Beth and I completed our wills – let me read you a bit: I give, devise, and bequeath all of rest, residue, and remainder of my property to Reuben Wallace Stewart Berry. Let me ask you – prior to being brought into our family, what right did Reuben or Theo have to any of our estate? They had absolutely none. Did they deserve any right to our estate? They did not. What did they do to be made beneficiaries of our estate? They did nothing. In fact, in the state we came to them they neither knew nor cared for us and they certainly did not choose us. Yet, they stand to benefit much from us, their parents. In an earthly sense, they have received all that they need and much, much, more. Beloved, should we not with tears rejoice in all that we have and are to receive as children adopted into the family of God. Such reflections should put this current life in sharp perspective.

### **Through Adoption We are Placed into Relationship with God as Our Father** (Romans 8:15-16, Galatians 4:6-7)

So let's dig a little deeper into this inheritance and understand a few of the benefits of adoption more specifically. Romans 8 and Galatians 4 tell us very clearly that because we are adopted, God has sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts by whom we cry, “*Abba! Father!*” Wayne Grudem makes an insightful observation with regards to God

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<sup>5</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 323.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 4:13, Galatians 3:29, Ephesians 1:11, Hebrews 1:2, James 2:5, 1 Peter 1:4, among others.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:4

becoming our father, "...God could have given us justification [and regeneration] without the privileges of adoption into his family<sup>8</sup>." But he has not done this. Instead, he brings us into intimate relationship with himself. Think about this for a moment: Do you realize that you have the same Father as Jesus? Do you realize that because you are a child of God, you have God's Spirit in your heart? Creator of the universe, king over all nations, is closer to you than your own father.

Our sons have earthly biological fathers of course, though it is not likely they will have a father-son relationship with these men. But, because they have been adopted, they will know the love, the discipline, the training, the kindness, the gentleness, the sacrifice, the protection, and the care of a father. Their lives are radically different than they would have been. For believers, the scenario is even better. We have a *perfect* heavenly father, who has given us his Spirit. It is by this Spirit that we are able to speak in terms of endearment to God himself: Abba Father, Papa, Daddy. And how far will God the father go to rescue his children? Have no doubt he will do whatever it takes, even if it looks like the murder of his son on a rough-hewn crucifix. Oh how deep the father's love for us.

If only we will believe, we can completely rest in such a Father.[jumping with Reuben, Reuben calling at 5:30 in the morning, if you had a poor father figure].

### **Through Adoption We are Placed into Relationship with Other Believers as Our Siblings**

Perhaps one of the sweetest blessings of adoption that we can touch, feel, and hear on this side of heaven is the church. In addition to God becoming our father, his children become our brothers and sisters. We are members of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10) with all other believers dating back even to Abraham. The corollary of this truth is that we are cut off from our natural family (not necessarily our biological family). That is, we are no longer children of wrath, sons of disobedience, acknowledging in our lives that the Devil is our father. So hear me loud and clear – the spiritual reality is this – if you are a believer you have been cut clean out of your previous family and placed eternally into God's family. You are a new creation. You would search long and hard to no avail for a birth certificate for Reuben that had a name on it other than Devon and Beth Berry as mother and father. There are no asterisks, fine print, limitations or expiration date. The same is true for believers. Reuben and Theo were adopted, but they are now our children – not our "adopted children." Reuben and Theo came to be brothers through adoption, but they are now simply brothers, not "brothers by adoption." For the believer, as for my sons, there is a new reality. A new heritage. A new legal standing and it cannot be undone.

For many of you, this may mean you are, in fact, much closer to your church family than you are your own biological family. What a profound blessing it is that God can intertwine hearts among believers this way. Even better, however, is the reality that believ-

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<sup>8</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Bible Doctrine*, p. 323.



ers, like my sons, will grow up in a community where they will have hundreds of mothers, fathers, brother, and sisters.

### **Through Adoption We will Experience the Redemption of Our Bodies**

(Romans 8:23)

Finally, and with this we will close, our adoption is yet to be fully realized. Romans 8:23 reads: *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* There is coming a day when all believers, those in heaven and those on earth, will receive their new physical bodies – perfect in every way. I've spent much time this week with Barbara Lee as she is confronted with the reality of an earthly body quickly wasting away. Oh how she and all believers can rejoice that through adoption, we can know that the kindest and gentlest Father, who calls the death of his children precious, awaits them. But as if this wasn't enough, in due time, in addition to giving us himself, he will give us new bodies perfectly suited for eternity.

So beloved, praise our heavenly father with me for the glories of adoption [Let's Pray].