

ADOPTION: HEIRS OF GOD!

INTRODUCTION TO ADOPTION: HEIRS OF GOD!

By Frank R. Parrish

The biblical doctrine of spiritual ADOPTION is not widely studied, nor is it well understood. Yet this scriptural principle reveals important, even profound, truths about our relationship to God.

I encourage you to prayerfully study this biblical teaching on Spiritual Adoption. As you study, earnestly ask the Holy Spirit to help your mind to understand and your heart to receive this truth. If you do these things, the scriptural truth of Adoption will transform your personal relationship with the living Lord and reshape the ministry service you offer to Him and to your church.

The idea of *adoption* as practiced in our world today is one that most of us are familiar with. It is usually when a kindhearted adult takes in an unwanted or orphaned child and makes that child part of their family. Adoption of this kind is practiced in most of the world, and has been done for thousands of years. The Bible *also* has much to say about adoption. However, when Scripture refers to adoption, this term represents far more than the taking in of an orphan.

What did the Holy Spirit want us to know about the concept of adoption? He inspired the apostle Paul to write: *“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of **adoption** by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’”* (Rom 8:15); *“...having predestined us to **adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will”* (Eph 1:5); *“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the **adoption** as sons”* (Gal 4:4,5).

God divinely revealed a precious truth through the biblical writings of His servants that He wants us to know and embrace. Our modern-day concept of adoption is certainly wonderful and a tremendous blessing to any orphaned

child. Yet, by comparison, it is but a shadow of the deeply profound blessing and purpose of *spiritual adoption* by our loving heavenly Father.

THE PRACTICE OF ADOPTION

To gain a better understanding of Paul's reference to adoption in the New Testament, it will be useful to look more closely at adoption as it was practiced in the culture of His day.

A. CULTURAL BACKGROUND

1. JEWISH AND MIDDLE EASTERN CULTURES

Many of the eastern cultures practiced adoption in one form or another. Ancient historical texts reveal that the Babylonians, Nuzi, Ugarit and other peoples who were contemporaries of the Israelites all practiced adoption.

The actual Hebrew term for "adoption" does not appear in the Old Testament. However, the concept of a child receiving the privileges, name and advantages of another's family is seen in several Old Testament passages:

- Abram proposing to adopt his family's servant as his heir (Gen 15:1-4)
- Abram and Sarai being willing to adopt the child of Hagar as Abram's heir (Gen 16:1-3)
- The adoption of the two sons of Joseph as Jacob's own sons (Gen 48:5)
- Moses' adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex 2:10)
- Gerubath being raised in Pharaoh's court as one of his sons (1Ki 11:19,20)
- Esther's adoption by Mordecai (Esther 2:7,15)

The idea of adoption is also present in Israelite literature (see Proverbs 17:2; 29:21). These references may refer to the adoption of slaves into a free household. Also, this type of adoption may have provided the way for the child born of a free father and a slave mother to inherit property (Gen 21:1-10; 30:1-13).

ADOPTED BY GOD

But the most profound and important picture of adoption in the Old Testament is that of God adopting Israel as His child.

The people of Israel are referred to as God's sons or children when they were redeemed from their slavery in Egypt (Ex 4:22; 14:2; 32:5,18-20). Even when God entered into judgment and pronounced His displeasure with Israel, He still called Israel His son (Isa 1:2,4; Jer 3:19; Hos 1:10, 11:1-2).

The concept of adoption is very present in the Old Testament. Thus it was also very present in the culture and religious training of the Jewish people, including during the lifetime of Paul the apostle.

2. ROMAN AND GREEK CULTURES

Clearly, Paul's explanation of spiritual adoption includes the ideas and pictures of Israel's exodus from Egypt. But Paul was also raised in, and exposed to, the dominant Roman culture of his day. And it was the Romans who fully developed the cultural practice of adoption. This practice served both as a practical civic function and as a legal institution.

Thus when Paul explains our spiritual adoption, he combines the rich imagery and concepts of both cultures by drawing on:

- the history of the Jewish people, and
- the adoption laws and practices of the Roman culture in which Paul was raised.

Keep in mind that studying these two cultural traditions will help us to understand the concepts Paul wrote of regarding spiritual adoption.

ROMAN ADOPTION

In a typical Roman family, the father was the absolute head and ruler. All persons related by blood in that family were under his complete authority. This was also true of all those who had been added to the family through legal adoption.

The Roman legal adoption process was completed by a *ceremony of conveyance*. This ceremony took place before a Roman court of justice, where the person being adopted was **transferred** to the family of the adopter. This *transfer* had to be witnessed and attested to by another trustworthy

person. Roman adoption could be carried out regardless of the age of the person being adopted.

The keys to understanding the process of adoption in Roman society are: **(a) the authority of the adopting father; (b) the complete change the adoption brought into the life of the person being adopted.**

Adoption included many changes for **the adopted person**, such as:

- All prior relationship or loyalties were severed.
- All former debts and obligations were cancelled or paid by the new family.
- The adopted person was made an heir to the father's estate.
- The adopted person experienced a more full relationship with the adopting father and new family, which would define and shape the adopted person's views on life, himself and the world around him.

The adopted son was also under the complete authority of his new father, which meant the new father:

- was considered the owner of all the adopted person's possessions and life;
- had the right to discipline and guide the adopted person's behavior;
- became accountable for the actions of the adopted person.

The act of adoption also meant that both parties were committed to supporting and helping maintain the other. The father would support and take care of the adopted person, and the adopted person would support and contribute to his new family.

Adoption clearly gave many important rights and privileges to the new heir. However, it also required the adoptee to accept his own set of duties and responsibilities.

Obedience and submission by the adopted person to his new father was justly expected. The adopted person was also not to bring shame or dishonor upon his new father and family; instead, he was to live in a way that added to the honor, influence and prestige of his father and family.

PRINCIPLES OF ADOPTION FROM SCRIPTURE

The New Testament Greek word for “adoption” is *huiothesia*. This is a compound of the root words for “son” and “a placing”. It implies more than placing a *child* – it is the placing of a *son*. The importance of this will be studied later in this teaching.

A. PAUL’S USAGE OF ADOPTION

The apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the word **adoption**. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, uses this “word picture” five times in the New Testament.

The word “adoption” is used once in reference to Israel (Rom 9:4); it is used three times to refer to the life of the born-again believer (Rom 8:12-17; Gal 4:1-5; Eph 1:3-6); and finally, Paul uses “adoption” to refer to our hope for the future when we will fully experience the completion of our faith at Christ’s second coming (Rom 8:22,23).

1. DEFINING ADOPTION

Before we continue this study of adoption, it is important to briefly present another biblical truth that will aid our understanding. When the Bible uses the word “son” in reference to a follower of Christ, that term includes people of **both male and female** gender. Thus, in this teaching, we will use the biblical word “son” when referring to the adopted child, which can mean either a male or a female.

This “sonship” for both male and female believers means that the *full inheritance from God* is received by *every* person who is saved by faith in Jesus Christ (see Galatians 3:26-28 and Colossians 3:11). There is no difference between the male or female heir. Every person is equally entitled to his or her inheritance in Christ, and to the full benefits and privileges of being a son.

LIMITS OF HUMAN ADOPTION

In order to fully understand the scriptural principle of *adoption*, we must clearly define how it is used in the New Testament. Paul’s usage of this term is radically different from how we may think of this term in everyday life.

Most of us understand adoption as the means by which a child who is not born into a family can become a full member of a family. This adopted child

will likely have very different characteristics than the adopting parents. The adopted child and the adopting parents may differ in height or build, in personality, in emotional responses, or even in habits or patterns of speech.

Normally, the adopting parents recognize a quality or characteristic in an orphaned child that causes them to be drawn to that child. It might be the physical appearance, a charming personality or a happy disposition. Perhaps it will be the desperate need of an unwanted child, or compassion for a child's physical or mental limitations and the desire to help the child.

Regardless of the motive for the adoption, the act of human adoption does not *automatically impart* to the adopted child the nature, disposition or characteristics of the adopting parents.

But in this regard, there are radical and wonderful differences between the human adoption process and our spiritual adoption into the Family of God!

A NEW CREATION

The first and most important difference is the fact that EVERY person who is adopted by God (*huiothesia* = placed as a son) has **first** been born again as a child of God (John 1:12,13). Adoption by God is not the *making* of a son. Rather, it is the **placing of one who has already become a son** by salvation through Christ.

When a person is born again by grace through faith in Christ (Eph 2:8-10), that person is immediately accepted by God as a child of His. Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection provided the way for every person who receives salvation through Jesus Christ to be restored to God as His child. God then immediately and sovereignly adopts that person into His family! Spiritual adoption takes place the moment a person receives Christ as their Savior and is born again by the Spirit.

The Bible reveals that when we are saved, we become a new creation in Christ (Gal 6:15). At our salvation, the former nature that we once had is changed (1Cor 6:9-11). We have become "born again", and all things to us become new (2Cor 5:17). We begin to live life as a forgiven, blood-washed individual. We have the presence of Christ by the Holy Spirit now living within us. We are a brand new person in our inner man, beginning a brand new spiritual life for the first time.

As this brand new person, we are then immediately placed in a new family – the Family of God. We are more than an orphan being moved into a different family. We are instead *newly born into* the Family of God as a brand new son. We are a full member of the Body of Christ.

We do not have to earn our sonship or prove our worth before we are accepted into God's Family. From the moment of our salvation, we are considered a son of our heavenly Father!

FULL SONSHIP – IMMEDIATELY!

This immediate spiritual adoption also means that we have immediate **maturity of position** in Christ. So then, **ALL** of the **responsibilities** and **privileges** of being a son in God's family are immediately ours.

There is not a “childhood phase” in God's expectation for our life. We are to immediately begin living a life of holiness, service and Christian responsibility, to the best of our ability and as God gives us the supernatural grace and help to do this (Phil 1:6). We are to begin to live as a member of God's Family, obeying His commands and serving Him as our loving Father.

Of course, there is a need for every new Christian to mature and grow as a believer in Jesus Christ. We will not become fully mature or perfected all at once (Phil 2:12,13). But in spite of this, it is vitally important for us to realize that at the moment of our salvation, we are spiritually **placed as a full son**. We immediately have **ALL** of the responsibilities – and privileges – of being a member of God's Family, regardless of our level of spiritual maturity in Christ. This is what it means to be given the **position** of a mature son.

PASTOR TO PASTOR

Pastor, this spiritual positioning from God is one of the reasons it is **vitally important** to teach and train New Believers. They need to understand Who God is, what He has done for them through Jesus, and what He expects of them. They must learn how to function as beloved sons of God, and how to live as His ambassadors on this earth.

Just like any small child, those who are “babes in Christ” must be nurtured, taught and trained. As shepherds of the flock of God, that is our primary calling (1Pet 5:2).

This pastoral role is a high calling and carries with it a great responsibility. God entrusts us with His “lambs”. We are to care for them, feed them with God’s Word, and lead them to know how to walk with the Lord. We do not have to be brilliant, talented or have lots of education. But we must be *faithful*, just as Moses was (Heb 3:2).

As pastors, we are called to love the sheep and protect them from those who might harm them (Acts 20:27-29). We are to lovingly serve our flock, helping them to mature and grow as sons and daughters of our Father in heaven.

As church leaders, we must do our best to faithfully represent the Great Shepherd to His sheep. We must always strive to rightly teach the Word of God, guiding those we lead to know and understand their heavenly Father. We will one day give an account for how faithfully we carried out this holy calling (Heb 13:17; 1Pet 5:2-4).

MISTAKEN HUMAN LOGIC

There is often misinterpretation of the scriptures about spiritual adoption. This leads to a misunderstanding of our true standing before God after salvation.

In human society, it is usually the mature adult son who receives the privileges of being an heir to the father’s property. Some people mistakenly apply that same human logic to a key passage wherein Paul writes about the principle of adoption (Gal 4:1-7). But before we examine that passage, let us first look at the previous chapter of Galatians. This will help set the context for Paul’s revealing statements about our spiritual adoption.

PURPOSE OF THE LAW

Paul forcefully argues that no one can be justified by the law (Gal 3:10-14,21,22; see also Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:9-28). It is impossible for humans to completely obey all of the law. So the law can never save us or restore us to our place as sons of the Living God.

But the law, as given by God, still had great purpose: That purpose was to reveal to us our sin and our need of a Savior Who *could* fulfill the requirements of the law and redeem us (Gal 3:19-22).

Paul then uses the Roman characteristics of adoption to further show how God used the law. Scripture states that *“before faith [salvation] came”* we were *“kept under guard”* by the law and the *“law was our tutor”* (Gal 3:23,24). In Roman households, it was common to have an adult steward or guardian who was responsible to discipline and care for the children. Thus, Paul **contrasts** being *“kept under guard”* by a steward (the law) with our new position as sons upon our salvation: *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ”* (3:26).

The Greek word for “sons” used by Paul in this passage is *huios*. Notice that it is the same root word used for “adoption” (*huios/thesia*, son/placing). Paul’s use of this word reveals to us that the moment we are born again, we are no longer under the “guardianship” of the Law (Gal 3:25; Rom 7:6). Rather, we are placed by God’s sovereign action as **full sons in God’s family**. In other words, at salvation, God places us in the *position* of a *mature* son.

Now, with this context in mind, let us look at Paul’s key passage regarding our spiritual adoption.

OUR SPIRITUAL CONDITION BEFORE ADOPTION

“Now I say that the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, ‘Abba, Father!’ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal 4:1-7).

In this passage, Paul is using a “word-picture” of Roman cultural adoption to reveal spiritual truths. The child in the family was little more than a slave in terms of his freedoms (v.1). Yet he had the *potential* to be placed as a son and receive the benefits when he grew to full maturity or when the father died.

Paul then makes a statement as to the spiritual condition of the “*children*” in verse 3 – that they are “*in bondage under the elements of the world*”. This reveals a key point in understanding spiritual adoption.

ADOPTION: A FREE GIFT

The word “*elements*” used by Paul has two meanings in the New Testament. It describes both the elementary principles of Old Testament law and the pagan religious practices of Gentiles (see Galatians 4:8-11; Colossians 2:16-23).

Jewish law and pagan religious expressions would seem to have little in common. However, what they both did in practice was to try and replace true salvation by faith in Christ and the presence and power of the Holy Spirit with rituals, traditions and customs of men (see also Galatians 3:1-9). But neither the rituals of the law nor the practice of pagan religions could ever bring anyone salvation.

When Paul speaks of those in bondage to the elements of the world, it is clear that Paul is referring to the **unsaved** person (Gal 4:3). He was not referring to someone who was newly born again or simply immature in the things of God. Thus, *Paul was **not** saying that we only earn our spiritual sonship as we mature in Christ.* Paul’s word-picture is clear in its meaning: We cannot earn our placement as God’s sons. Instead, when we receive Christ as our Savior, at salvation **the “child” immediately becomes the son.** *We are placed in a mature position* in full relationship with the Father and as a full heir.

This placement is not something we have to work to fulfill. We cannot earn the position God freely gives us, that of being His sons. Instead, it is a **free gift**. This gift empowers us to fulfill God’s will and bring more glory to His name. Hallelujah!

GOD’S PERFECT TIMING

Paul goes on in this passage to reveal God’s actions in the flow of human history. Prior to the coming of Christ, one could only choose to serve either a false pagan religion or the Jewish Law. And neither could bring salvation or restore one to God.

But at the right moment, when the *“fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son”* so that the Son would fulfill the law (Matt 5:17,18) and make salvation by faith in Him possible.

PASTOR TO PASTOR

In Galatians 4:8, Paul writes, *“But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods.”* Paul then writes about *“the weak and beggarly elements”* (Gal 4:9). It is clear that Paul, by the Holy Spirit, is linking demonic spirits with the practice of human religious rituals and philosophies.

The demonic realm is not concerned when people are religious. After all, it is demons that have invented and promoted false human religions and the slavery to these deceptions that destroys people around the world.

However, Satan and his demons *are* concerned when confronted with the true power of God. For they know that their power was broken at the Cross of Jesus Christ (Col 2:14,15; Heb 2:14; 1John 3:8; 4:4). They also know they are doomed to eternal damnation (Rev 20:10).

God did **not** send Jesus to give us a new religion, philosophies or rituals. Rather, Jesus came to give us **abundant life** (John 10:10) – Life that is anointed by the power of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18) to equip us to do His work now (Col 1:27-29) and to anticipate with sure hope our eternal destiny to come (1Pet 1:3-9).

Through Christ, we have been set free from the *“weak and beggarly elements”* of false religion and deception, that we might walk in the light and truth of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). Hallelujah!

FULLY SONS FROM THE MOMENT OF SALVATION

Paul continues on with his word-picture in Galatians. He reveals that just as Roman adoption required a witness, so too are Christians given a witness: The Holy Spirit! (Gal 4:6) When we are saved, the Holy Spirit bears witness that we have become part of the Family of God.

The Holy Spirit is given to us at salvation (John 3:5-8; Titus 3:5). Paul goes on to tell us more of what happens at the moment of salvation:

- we have available to us immediate intimacy with the Father (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15,16);
- we are made full heirs with Christ (Gal 4:7).

These things that coincide with our spiritual adoption take place immediately at our salvation. They are accomplished solely by God's sovereign work of grace. Our adoption, like our salvation, **cannot be earned**, nor can it be achieved by any effort of our own.

At salvation, we are placed as full sons into the Family of God by the loving hand of our Father God. To be sure, as we grow in personal maturity and discipline in the things of God, we will become more fruitful and effective in our service to Him. However, our service will not make us *more* loved by God or *more* His sons. **We are fully sons from the moment we are saved.**

Our identity as a believer is **first** that we are a son of God and part of His family; then all else follows. We are not a pastor who is a son. We are a beloved son who is doing the work of a pastor!

Though it is important in this life what you do and who you are becoming, we must remember: ***the most important thing*** in this life for every Christian to understand is that they are **first** loved by God and placed as His sons – then all else that they are and will do should flow from that understanding.

In later sections, we will discuss more fully the privileges, responsibilities and freedoms that come to us as beloved sons who have been spiritually adopted into God's Family.

REGENERATION AND JUSTIFICATION

This study has allowed us to confidently assert that our spiritual adoption – our placement as sons into the Family of God – takes place the moment we are born again. At this same moment, we also receive *justification* by our faith in Christ (Gal 2:16), and we experience *regeneration* by the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5).

Justification briefly means that when we come to salvation through faith in Christ, God declares us righteous. This is solely based upon our faith in the sacrifice of Christ for our sins at the Cross (Rom 4:3). We can never become righteous by our own works.

But justification is more than forgiveness of our sin and the removal of our guilt. When God justifies us, He places into our *spiritual account* the perfect righteousness of Christ (1Cor 1:30; 2Cor 5:21). Our full debt for the penalty of our sin has been paid by Christ's perfect sacrifice for us. We need only to receive His saving work.

Regeneration is a sovereign work of God, by the Holy Spirit, that takes place at our salvation (John 3:5-8). Regeneration, or new birth, is an inner re-creation of our fallen human nature. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, but at salvation we are regenerated and made a new creature who is now alive in Christ (Eph 2:1,5).

Regeneration is closely related to adoption, and is bound together with it. Regeneration prepares us for a new life as a member of God's Family. It also prepares us for living in, and exercising the privileges of, adoption. Those who are regenerated are sovereignly adopted by God, placed into the mature position as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:15-17; Gal 4:6,7).

DESTINED TO BE SONS

Our adoption was planned in the eternal councils of God, "*having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will*" (Eph 1:5). Our placement as sons is not an afterthought of God. He created us to be His children, but we lost our inheritance through sin. So God, in His love and mercy, provided a way for our true inheritance and position to be restored – through the sacrificial death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins (Gal 4:4,5).

We cannot place ourselves as sons. Only God the Father can do this for us. For all those who have surrendered their hearts to Christ and believed on Him for salvation, it is God's will that they are adopted – placed as sons – into His Family! There is no earning, working or waiting to prove that one is worthy to be accepted as His son.

THE PRICE OF ADOPTION

Thank God for what He has done for us: Sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins and to save us; and adopting us – placing us – as His fully **accepted** and **established** sons! (Eph 1:6) But surely there must be a price for what our heavenly Father has provided for us through our adoption. We were clearly not adopted because we are worthy or deserving.

A. THE PRICE OF THE FREE GIFT

We can be thankful that our adoption does **not** depend upon our worthiness! For which of us is truly worthy of God's love and tender mercies? "...*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rom 3:23; see also verses 10-18).

All of humanity is totally lost in our sins and under the just and righteous condemnation of God's wrath (Eph 2:3; 5:6; Col 3:6,7). Mankind can do nothing to save himself (Eph 2:8,9; Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16). Who, then, can save us? And if they are *able* to save us, are they *willing* to save us?

God's just condemnation of sin requires that His justice be satisfied before His mercy can be bestowed. God's judgment on sin is absolutely fixed. "*The soul who sins shall surely die*" (Ezek 18:4,20). The penalty for our willful choice of sin is death.

Yet God's heart has also never wavered from His absolute love for humanity, who are made in His image (Gen 1:26,27) and for His glory.

God's perfect holiness and justice demand the righteous condemnation and punishment of our sin. Yet the Bible makes clear that God's love and compassion for us are great and everlasting (Jer 31:3; Lam 3:22,23; Rom 8:37-39). What then can God do?

THE FATHER'S ETERNAL PLAN FULFILLED

From the moment of Adam and Eve's rebellion and fall into sin, God in His omnipotent wisdom and great mercy knew what He would do (see Genesis 3). One of the five New Testament passages that speak of our spiritual adoption also reveals this eternal plan of the Father: "*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to*

redeem those who were under the law [the just condemnation of sin], that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal 4:4,5).

John the apostle wrote it this way: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

As pastors and leaders of the Church of God, you know that God did not send His Son to earth for just a visit or to give us some new thoughts about religion. Instead, God sent His Son for the express purpose of dying (Acts 2:23; 3:18; see also Hebrews 2:9). Christ died – gave His very life – in our place. He willingly took onto Himself the just condemnation of **our** sin – suffering and taking the penalty of death in our place (2Cor 5:21).

The death of Jesus Christ – when we choose to believe on Him and accept that He died for our sin – makes it possible for us to turn to Him in faith for salvation. Christ’s saving work is a free gift of grace that cannot be earned. God sent Jesus because of His love for us (Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-10) and His desire *“in bringing many sons to glory”* (Heb 2:10). Hallelujah!

YOUR WORTH TO GOD

Our adoption – placing us as mature sons with full privileges – is part of this act of grace that God the Son (Jesus) accomplished for us at the Cross. *“Having predestined us to **adoption** as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself according to the good pleasure of His will”* (Eph 1:5). In His one act at the Cross, by suffering and dying for us, Jesus has made it possible for the *“children [heirs] of wrath”* (Eph 2:3) to become the *“children [heirs] of promise”* (Rom 8:17; Gal 4:28).

Before Christ shed His sacrificial blood for us at the Cross, we were *“enemies”* and *“aliens”* (Rom 5:10; Eph 2:12; 4:18; see also Colossians 1:20). Yet now, by faith in Christ, we are made sons of God (Gal 3:26). Our adoption, like our salvation, does not depend upon, nor can it be gained by, any worthiness or effort of our own. Rather, it depends solely upon the unmerited favor – *grace* – that God bestows upon any and all who come to Him by faith in Christ.

The price of our adoption is literally, and no less than, the life and blood of Jesus Christ. Peter declares, *“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible [perishable] things, like silver or gold, from your aimless [useless, empty, fruitless] conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the*

precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pet 1:18,19; see also 1:23).

Our sonship, our adoption, is based upon the perfect and imperishable blood of Christ. There are times when the devil will condemn you, lie to you or try to discourage you by telling you that you are a failure or that you are unloved or unworthy. But you can tell him that you have absolute proof that **the devil is a liar!**

Your value as a person – your worth to God – is revealed by what it cost our Father in Heaven to make you a son and place you as a fellow-heir with Christ. The price that was paid for you is nothing less than the priceless and matchless blood of God the Son! **That** is your worth and value to the King of kings and Lord of lords!

We need no longer struggle with doubts concerning our worthiness; Christ’s blood, forgiveness and love make us worthy. We need not fear for our future; as God’s adopted sons, we are heirs of all that our heavenly Father has promised to those who belong to Christ. We need not wrestle with guilt over our past; for when we repent and are saved and adopted into our Father’s family, we are severed from the past stain and penalty of our failures and sins. Glory to God!

The devil no longer has the power to enslave us (Heb 2:14-16), for he was conquered at the Cross (Col 2:15). But we must rise up to resist him, declaring the truth that we are God’s adopted children in full standing!

Our priceless adoption also has strong implications for us as God’s sons. To be His adopted sons means that God expects us to live life differently than before our adoption.

B. THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE FREE GIFT

When we receive Christ, we are transferred (conveyed) into God’s Kingdom (Col 1:13) and we become members of His household (Eph 2:19) in full standing (Rom 8:17). Because of this, there are some consistent implications as to how we must live our lives each day. As the Father’s adopted sons:

1. WE NO LONGER OWE ALLEGIANCE OR LOYALTY TO OUR OLD MASTERS.

Who are these previous masters? In Galatians 4:3, we are told: *“Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world.”* As we have learned, the word “elements” in this passage refers to the empty religions, philosophies and bondage to legalism that cannot save us.

Before we were saved, we were in bondage to these old masters. But now, in Christ, we are **set free** from:

- our sin and the judgment upon it (Col 1:11-14; 2:14);
- bondage to our sinful flesh (Romans 6);
- religious legalism, demonic doctrines and self-effort to earn our salvation (Col 2:16-23);
- the fear, intimidation and manipulative lies of the devil (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14-18).

We are to cut off and reject our old allegiances to ungodly masters. Scripture gives us a clear picture of the power we have in Christ to leave ungodly masters behind: *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”* (2Cor 5:17). However, the freedom from sin and bondage that we are given at salvation is not to be used selfishly. We have been set free, not to do whatever we **want** to do; rather, we have gained the freedom to now do as we **ought** to do! Thus, another implication of our adoption is that:

2. WE OWE ALLEGIANCE AND LOYALTY TO GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE.

The Bible reveals: *“And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again”* (2Cor 5:15).

Our Lord is to command our words and actions not just while we are at church or functioning in ministry. If this is all we allow Him, then we are behaving like the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus’ day (Matthew 23). We have an outward religious form, but we are not fully serving God from our hearts and with all of our lives (Matt 15:7-9).

Jesus poured out His precious blood and gave His life that He might be the Lord of **every part** of our life – the Lord over our hearts as well as our habits! His desire, and the desire of the Father, is that they fill up our lives and occupy the “first position” of our heart.

We have an obligation to be more than a *prodigal son*. In other words, we should not take our grand spiritual inheritance gained for us by Jesus' death and our adoption, and then selfishly squander all the life, joy, peace, grace, purpose and hope that was provided. (You can read more about the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32.) The gifts and callings of God are for our blessing and for HIS purposes and use, to bring Him glory and to further His Kingdom. It is true that the prodigal son was forgiven and received back by his father.

This does provide a beautiful picture of the mercy and love of God. However, much of what the prodigal son lost in purpose and gifts, and in God-given potential, was never to be recovered. Further, had he not repented, the prodigal's wayward life would have led to a certain and eternal destruction.

PASTOR TO PASTOR

All of us are aware of spiritual leaders who were called and empowered by God to do His will. He gave them good gifts and abilities. He called them for His use, to serve Him and others for the sake of the eternal purposes of God.

But then they began to allow ungodliness in their hearts. Often pride or fleshly desires crept in and were not dealt with. Soon that led to sin, such as: justifying the stealing of money; committing sexual sin; abandoning their families; or other compromises of the flesh. They came to love their positions, titles of respect, and *“the praise of men more than the praise [approval] of God”* (John 12:43) – serving those things instead of the Lord.

For a time, it may have appeared that these leaders were getting away with something, fooling others and even God. But God is never fooled (Gal 6:7,8). Nor does God look lightly upon sin and rebellion (Heb 3:12-15; Jude 8-11). Sinful behavior eventually leads to serious consequences, even destruction (Jas 1:13-15); this applies to all people, including church leaders.

Sin also damages the testimony of the pastor and the church in the community. Families suffer, and much pain and grief is experienced by all who become aware of the failures. It is no wonder that Satan works so hard to tempt away and destroy leaders in the Church! (Luke 22:31).

But where does sin begin? It begins in the heart (Matt 12:34,35; 15:19; 2Pet 2). When our hearts are not fully loyal and submitted to God – fearing Him in

all godliness and reverence – then other things begin to press out the Lord's first place in our heart. But if we prepare and give our hearts fully to the Lord, He will go before us and establish our way (1Sam 7:3; Prov 3:5-8).

So pastors, watch over your hearts! (Prov 4:23) Daily submit your heart to the Lord in prayer. Ask Him to reveal any weakness, deception or fleshly desire that may be taking root. We cannot always know our own heart (Jer 17:9,10). But God looks upon our hearts (1Sam 16:7) and He can bring conviction to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Be faithful to read your Bible every day as well. For the living Word of God has the power to reveal to you what is in your heart (Heb 4:12). Then obey what you read, becoming one who **does** the Word! (Jas 1:22)

3. ALL THAT WE HAVE – AND ALL THAT WE ARE – BELONG TO THE LORD.

As adopted sons, our lives, relationships, gifts, abilities, potential and earthly possessions all belong to God. Everything about us, including our desires and hopes (Ps 37:4,5), are to be submitted to God and to His wise rulership.

Some people, in their fear or their selfishness, may rationalize or justify withholding their *time*, *talent* or *treasure* from God. But the reality is that whatever is not given to God and is kept back for ourselves *is also kept back from His blessing upon it*.

We should desire above all else the blessing of God upon everything in our lives! But that requires us to surrender everything to God. This means to give Him charge of even the untransformed areas in our lives. When we do this, it releases God to deal with us, our needs, our sins, our desires, in His all-wise and all-powerful way. As we yield and respond to His convicting work – confessing and repenting of our sin and becoming more obedient to His Word – He will shape us into the image of His Son, which is His will for us (Rom 8:29). Then God can trust us with even more of His blessings and assignments!

Remember, as an adopted son, the goal and effort of our whole life is to bring glory and honor to our Heavenly Father. We are also to bless and honor His household (the Church – Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19), of which we are a vital part.

4. AS SONS PLACED IN A MATURE POSITION OF INHERITANCE, WE ARE OBLIGATED TO CONSISTENTLY PURSUE SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Being placed as a son – spiritual adoption – happens when we are born again. In the case of *human adoption*, the adopted child usually becomes an heir upon the death of the adopting parent. It is assumed that the child will have grown up and matured, and been proved worthy of receiving his inheritance.

However, God's ways are not always man's ways (Isa 55:8,9). We do not have to prove ourselves worthy of our inheritance as God's sons and saints. This is important, since no one is worthy of the wonderful gifts and blessings that are given to us as a spiritual inheritance. Instead, our son-placement (adoption) and our inheritance are received freely *by faith*, just as we receive our salvation. We must believe what God has promised in His Word and receive what He has freely provided.

It is important to emphasize, however, that the Scriptures reveal that *we must also mature spiritually*. We all begin as babes in Christ who need to grow (1Cor 3:1-3). Though our adoption places us in a mature position – qualified to receive all of God's provision – we must still *grow up* in the things of our faith, away from carnality and toward true spirituality.

This spiritual growth does not earn us more inheritance. We cannot become more worthy than Christ has already made us through His work at the Cross. But we must learn to function more faithfully and fruitfully in the sonship and inheritance God has given to us.

THE NECESSITY OF GROWTH

As we are faithful to obey God and be transformed from within, we become more and more capable of handling the privileges our Father wants us to have (see Matthew 25:14-29).

There are many biblical passages of exhortation regarding our maturing as God's sons. For example, we are to grow:

- in faith (2Cor 10:15);
- in the knowledge of God (Col 1:10; 2Pet 1:1-4);

- in grace (2Pet 3:18);
- in spiritual wisdom (Eph 1:17-19);
- in knowing Christ and His work (Phil 3:7-11);
- in understanding our calling (Phil 3:12-16);
- in righteous priorities (Col 3:1-4);
- in sanctification (2Pet 1:5-8).

These examples represent just a few of the many ways in which we are to be continually growing and being transformed after our salvation. Take time to search the Scriptures for even more ways you can spiritually grow as a son of God.

THE PATHWAY OF GROWTH

It must be stated that spiritual growth and maturity in Christ is *not automatic*. God, by the Holy Spirit, will always be faithful to meet us and help to transform us. But this process must have our full cooperation – including a willingness to repent, change, deny our flesh, obey the Word of God, and more.

The Bible is clear that in order to grow and mature spiritually, there are things we must do. We must:

- feed on the Word of God (1Pet 2:2; Heb 5:11-14);
- be devoted to the systematic study of God's Word (1Tim 4:13; 2Tim 2:15), *especially* as church leaders;
- strive to make the kind of choices in life that will help you to mature spiritually (1Tim 4:8-16; 6:11,12,20; Heb 5:14; 1John 3:1-3);
- be continually filled, again and again, with God's Spirit (Eph 5:18).

Our Father wants us to grow up in Him. He has given us all that we need to be partakers of His divine nature (2Pet 1:2-4). He has committed Himself and all of heaven's resources to the process of our growth and spiritual maturity. And He has given us the privilege of partnering with Him as He works in us (Phil 2:12,13).

God desires for us, as His sons, to do great things in His Kingdom. Because this is true, we must give ourselves to being mature and trustworthy heirs. (See 1 Corinthians 2:6; 14:20; Philippians 1:6; 3:15; Hebrews 5:12-14).

As we have learned, there are both responsibilities and privileges for the adopted son or daughter. Let us now examine some of the wonderful privileges we have been given as the adopted children of God.

THE PRIVILEGE OF ADOPTION

Our adoption – being placed as sons – puts us into a new kind of relationship. Both the adopted son and the adopting parent are committed by the act of adoption to support, help and maintain the other. We have just studied the implications and obligations that are to be fulfilled by the one being adopted.

But there are also great **privileges** given to one who has been *placed as a son*. This is true even in human adoption. But those who have become sons of God are given priceless and eternal privileges. Let us study those now.

A. THE GREATEST PRIVILEGE OF ADOPTION IS TO NOW HAVE GOD AS YOUR FATHER (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5).

Every living thing owes its existence to God, especially mankind (Acts 17:25,28). All men have God as their Father, **but only** in the sense that He is the Creator of all (John 1:3). We have no relation to God as our Father before we are born again and enter into adoption as sons of God. The unbeliever can call God “Judge”, but not Father.

Now for us who are truly made sons of God by the new birth through faith in Christ, we have been given the greatest privilege of all. We are brought into God’s family, and He has bestowed upon us all of the love, privileges and rights of a son.

Our Father is not ashamed to call us His sons and daughters (2Cor 6:18; Heb 2:11). We are not an abandoned child that God was obligated to take in. The Bible teaches us that God “*chose us in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4). All humanity was wanted and chosen by God before our world even existed!

God also “*predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will*” (Eph 1:5). God has willed many things; but our adoption is according to the *good pleasure* of His will. He has always wanted us, providing the way through Christ for us to choose to come to Him as His children. What a great honor and glory to be God’s *wanted* son! Perhaps you (or someone in your church) were not wanted as a child by your earthly parents. Or perhaps you felt unloved, more like a burden or a nuisance than someone who was cherished or desired.

Please know that God, your heavenly Father, has always wanted you! He has laid precious and magnificent plans for your life, and for the life of every member of your church and family (Jer 29:11-13; Esth 4:14; 1Cor 2:9). God has set aside provision and resource for you (Matt 6:33; Phil 4:19). And He is actively working in you and for your good (Rom 8:28-30). Praise His holy name!

PASTOR TO PASTOR

It is often parental neglect, rejection or abandonment that causes a person to feel unwanted or unloved by others and by God. Thus, let me exhort you, dear pastor, to never allow the busy activities of ministry to cause you to fail to fulfill your first responsibilities to your wife and children in this regard.

The Bible is clear that your marriage and family are a higher priority than ministry (Eph 5:22-33). Your personal relationship to the Lord is always the first priority for your life. But if you are married, your wife is then the second priority. If you have children, caring for them is your third priority. This means loving and providing for your family, nurturing them and teaching them the ways of the Lord (Deut 6:7). Then, ministry comes *after* your personal walk with the Lord, and after your responsibilities to your wife and children.

If your marriage or children are showing signs of neglect, you become disqualified for leadership in the Church (1Tim 3:1-5). And worse, your neglect may cause harm that opens your family to being unwilling or unable to receive God’s love and plans for them.

It is a challenge to balance work, family and ministry. None of us does that perfectly. But we must always strive to follow God’s instructions for our lives. These instructions are found in His Word. So take the time to study the scriptures that explain God’s priorities and standards for how to lead your

family. (Begin with Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20,21; 1Peter 3:1-7; and Malachi 2:13,14,16.)

B. OUR FATHER HAS GIVEN US HIS HOLY SPIRIT.

The many benefits of the “inheritance” gift of God’s Holy Spirit are innumerable. But some of them include:

1. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE “*SPIRIT OF ADOPTION*” (Rom 8:15).

This means that by the Holy Spirit’s presence in us, we can truly and personally know and experience a close and personal relationship with our Heavenly Father. Through the Spirit, we can cry out, “*Abba, Father*” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

The term “abba” denotes intimacy and affectionate respect. It was used in Bible times by children (even adult children) to affectionately address their fathers, and sometimes by students to their teachers. We might use a similar term with our earthly fathers, such as “daddy”.

Jesus used the term “abba” when He spoke to the Father (Mark 14:36). But “abba” was rarely used by Jews when referring to God; for although they had the law of God, they did not have the surpassing privilege of intimate personal relationship with Him. This became available only through Christ’s sacrificial work at the Cross.

2. WE HAVE BEEN DELIVERED FROM A SLAVISH FEAR OF GOD.

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom 8:15). We know there is to be a healthy and righteous “fear of the Lord,” a reverence and awe for the Almighty God. But we, as Christians, no longer need to labor under *“a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”* (Heb 10:27). The judgment for our sin has been satisfied; our death sentence for sin (Ezek 18:20) has been paid by Christ. We can proclaim, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Rom 8:1).

Because this is true, we can *“come boldly to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* (Heb 4:16; see also

10:19,22). Our Father who loves us will hear us when we call to Him, and will answer according to His perfect love and wisdom.

3. WE HAVE BEEN “SEALED” BY THE HOLY SPIRIT.

“In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:13,14).

As a legal act, Roman adoption had to be attested to by a reliable witness. We have already learned that in spiritual adoption, the Holy Spirit’s presence within us is our witness.

The Holy Spirit is there to give witness, to verify, that truly we are the legitimate sons of God. As God’s children, we are the heirs of His inheritance that we have in Christ. *“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom 8:16,17; see also Galatians 4:6,7).*

This idea of being “sealed” by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2Cor 1:22; 5:5) holds great importance for us. A “seal” in Greek culture, when stamped on a possession, was used to indicate ownership and to give protection against theft. A seal also indicated that a document or message was authentic, and conveyed the authority of the one who sent it.

As the adopted sons of God, who are *sealed* by the Holy Spirit, we are marked as true sons of God. We belong to Him, and He has given His angels charge over us (Ps 91:11,12). We are **under** God’s authority to do His will, and we also **have** God’s authority available to enable us to carry out His will (Luke 19:3; John 14:13; 15:16).

As sons of mature placement, we have been entrusted with the privilege to carry out our “Father’s business” in the world around us. We are to live and minister in Jesus’ name, by His authority and aligned with God’s will to carry out Kingdom business. Amen!

4. THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL GUIDE US.

“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

The Greek word translated as “led” is a *present participle*. This means that we are to be **continuously led** by the Holy Spirit. This is to become a way of life for every maturing believer, but especially for pastors and leaders in the Body of Christ.

This continual leading of the Holy Spirit will happen in two ways:

1) by a constant and growing knowledge of the Bible, coupled with a diligent and conscious effort to obey both the letter and spirit of the Word of God (1Tim 4:12-16; 2Tim 2:15; 3:16,17; Jas 1:21-25);

2) by cultivating a sensitivity to the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit, taking time to both pray *and listen* for a response as we go about our daily lives.

It is important to actively invite the presence of the Holy Spirit into our lives each day (Gal 5:16). We can ask Him to lead us in every situation or circumstance we face. Make it your habit to regularly talk to the Holy Spirit, asking Him for guidance and taking time to listen to what He will reveal to your heart.

PASTOR TO PASTOR

Pastor, please know that the Holy Spirit will **never** lead you to do or say anything that would displease the Lord or that would be contrary to what is already written in the Word of God.

The Holy Spirit, as God and the third person of the Trinity, will always **confirm** the Word of God and lead you into obedience to what God has already revealed in the Bible.

If you sense that the Holy Spirit is leading you to do something, it is wise to seek the advice of other counselors who are more mature in the Christian faith and knowledgeable in the Word (Prov 11:14; 24:6). Choose those who are experienced, mature believers who have a proven track record of faithfulness to God’s Word. Look for those who have the courage to speak the truth if they need to correct you.

You should also confirm that what you are sensing from the Holy Spirit does not contradict the letter or spirit of the Word of God. For example, the Holy Spirit would never lead you to take something that does not belong to you, for the Bible clearly reveals that we are not to steal (Ex 20:15; Eph 4:28).

A word here especially to men: A provision of wise counsel that God has already given to you is your wife. This does not mean she will always be right – in the same way that you will not always be right. However, a good and godly wife is a helpmeet (Gen 2:18) – and her help can sometimes come in the form of good advice.

Take time to pray with your wife as often as possible. And when you do, also take time to talk about what you may be sensing from the Holy Spirit. Many women are very sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Husbands need to have the humility to ask wives their opinion, and the wisdom to follow it if it is confirmed by the Word of God. Make every effort to regularly seek the Lord together!

C. OUR FATHER IS FULLY COMMITTED TO DISCIPLINE US.

Every parent eventually recognizes the importance of disciplining their children. But God's discipline is very different from the type of discipline an earthly parent might apply to a child.

The discipline of the Lord is not something to fear or dread. God does **not** discipline us out of disgust, anger or impatience. His discipline does not involve punishment, judgment or rejection. In fact, the opposite of these things is true!

God disciplines us *because* we are sons whom He loves. He disciplines us in order to release us from the bondage of sin and rebellion. God disciplines us to set us free to receive more of His anointing and blessing.

Take a moment to read Hebrews 12:3-13. God's "chastening" is not always because we have done something bad or need to be corrected. The word "chastening" actually contains the idea of strengthening or training that is necessary to fully develop our potential, in order for us to fulfill all the plans that God has for our lives. Strengthening our lives also has the added benefit of protecting us from possible future attacks or injury (Heb 12:12,13; see also 1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

D. SINCE WE ARE ADOPTED SONS, OUR FATHER DESIRES TO TRANSFORM US INTO THE IMAGE OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.

When we are adopted into God's family at salvation, He gives us not only a new name, but also a new nature. *"...as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"* (2Pet 1:3,4).

As Christians, we bear the name of the One who has adopted us (Acts 11:26; 1Pet 4:12-16). We also, through His provision and the working of His Spirit, are day by day being inwardly transformed into the image of God the Son – Jesus! (2Cor 3:18)

This process of transformation is continual throughout our lives. We are commanded to give ourselves to this process, and to cooperate with the working of the Holy Spirit. We are also to make every effort to become more like Him who adopted us: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God"* (Rom 12:1,2; see also 1 Corinthians 15:49 and 1 John 3:2,3).

Mankind was originally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27). But we have been distorted and marred by multiplied centuries of sin and rebellion and its effects. At salvation, however, we begin the glorious process of being restored to our Heavenly Father's likeness and image, transformed from within in order for our character to become more like His.

God is committed to our maturity and growth. His Spirit will continually convict us of our need to repent of (turn away from) harmful behavior. He will teach us how to trust, yield to and obey the Lord and His Word. God will even use the pressure of circumstances to mold and shape our lives, as a potter would shape and form a clay vessel (Isa 64:8).

As a loving heavenly Father, God is restoring us so that when we finally see Him face to face we shall be more like Him who made us (Ps 17:15).

E. AS SONS, WE ARE GIVEN THE PRIVILEGE OF LIBERTY.

“Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ” (Gal 4:7); “Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been set free through Christ from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2). We have been delivered from the elemental things of this world (Col 2:8,16-23). We no longer need to fear death (Heb 2:14,15), nor judgment and wrath (Rom 5:9).

Yet our adoption and the freedom it brings have even more purpose. The adopted son is not free to do whatever he *wants* (1Pet 2:16,17). Rather, we are now free to do as we *ought* to do in obedience to our Father’s will and His Word.

We have been set free to give faithful service to our God and to His household (the Church) and, as His messengers, to the entire world.

F. AS ADOPTED SONS, WE ARE GIVEN PROTECTION FROM EVIL.

God’s Word promises that His children will be kept from the power of evil (see Luke 10:19; John 17:11-15; Romans 8:31-39; 1 John 3:8; 4:4). The only power and authority that hell has in the life of the believer is what the believer accepts or allows. Jesus made provision for us to resist the devil (2Cor 10:3-5) and to be set free from anything of evil that would try to oppress us (Eph 6:10-18).

However, it is important to note that the Bible clearly states that in this life we will still experience trials, tribulations and opposition from the devil (see James 1:2-7,12,13; 1 Peter 4:12-19; Matthew 5:10-12; John 10:10; 2Cor 2:11; 11:13). We live in a broken, sin-filled world and will each face challenges and heartaches.

However, our heavenly Father promises to use even those difficulties to work great blessing in us and for us (Rom 8:10,28; 2Cor 4:7-18). In trials, we will have either God’s grace to endure or His power to be delivered (Jas 4:6-8; 1Pet 4:12,13; 1John 3:8; 4:4; Rev 12:11). But no matter the trial, the Lord will be with us; He will never leave us nor forsake us (Matt 28:20; Heb 13:5). He will give us what we need to run the race of this life with His strength and endurance, no matter the obstacles.

G. OUR ADOPTION PROVIDES US WITH A HOLY DIGNITY AND EQUALITY.

There are many places in the world today that consider some people less acceptable than others. People from particular castes, tribes or specific geographic areas, or who speak a certain language, are thought to be less valuable or lower in the social order. There are religions or countries that do not allow females the same dignity, privileges or respect as males receive. These and other forms of prejudice or oppression are not uncommon.

But for born-again followers of Jesus Christ, their adoption and status before God the Father place them on equal level with all other believers. For in Christ, *“there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”* (Gal 3:28, emphasis added; see also Colossians 3:11).

Those who are in Christ are now **all** of a royal bloodline (the blood of Jesus Christ) and all carry the same Family name and inheritance. The Bible reveals that believers are God’s *“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people”* (1Peter 2:9).

The dignity and self-worth of Christians is established by the price paid for us at the Cross of Calvary, and by the simple undeniable truth that God has set His love upon us (1John 3:1). Nothing can change that eternal truth (Rom 8:38,39). No matter the color, class, race or gender, believers are all equal with one another. They are each made worthy of God’s love in Christ, and are one in the bond of unity by the Spirit of God (Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:11-18; Col 3:11).

PASTOR TO PASTOR

Pastors, all that we say and do should reflect this very important biblical principle of equality. It has been said, “The ground at the foot of the Cross of Jesus is level”. In other words, all believers, whether young or old, male or female, high or low caste, rich or poor – ALL have equal worth and standing before God. ALL have equal access to God in salvation and relationship. God desires to pour out His Spirit upon **all** believers to empower them for service and to reflect His glory (Joel 2:28-30).

The Bible reveals a principle of unity that goes beyond just the relationship between a husband and wife (1Pet 3:7-12). As leaders, we must always

model righteous treatment of all those whom Christ died to save. We must treat others, no matter who they are, with dignity, honor and respect, modeling Christlike behavior to those whom we lead.

If your culture or background, your pride or your fear keep you from loving and releasing in ministry all believers equally, please reconsider your role as an elder or leader in the Church. Being a fruitful, effective leader requires that you live by and model the principles found in the Scriptures.

H. THE COMPLETE FULFILLMENT OF THE PRIVILEGES OF BEING ADOPTED BY GOD IS YET TO COME.

“Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23).

Being *justified* by faith in Christ sets us free from sin and condemnation (Rom 3:21-25,27,28). By our *adoption* we become sons who are placed as joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17; 1Cor 3:21-23; Gal 4:6,7; Heb 6:17; Rev 21:7). Our inheritance as God’s children has already begun. In that we are adopted children, the Bible calls us **children, sons** and **heirs**. As *children* we are already given the gift of a close relationship with our Father in heaven.

As *sons*, our placement or position before Him is secure and filled with promise for this life and for the life to come. As *heirs*, our inheritance is also both **now** and **future**.

Our future inheritance will be totally fulfilled when we pass from this life and see our Savior *“face to face”* (1Cor 13:12). The key to understanding this future inheritance is the promise contained in Ephesians 1:13,14. Take a moment to read that passage now (see also 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 4:30).

The sealing gift of the Holy Spirit given to us is stated as a “guarantee”. The word *guarantee* can be translated as *down payment, deposit or first installment*. In other words, God has given us His Spirit as a *down payment*, securing us for that day when God will fully receive us into eternity.

Our heavenly Father has paid the ultimate price for us by sending God the Son to take our sin upon Himself and die in our place on the Cross. Our Father then has given God the Spirit as a pledge, or guarantee, that our full

inheritance and the total redemption of our lives are secure and will be fulfilled.

The Bible reveals that even our mortal, weak and corruptible bodies will be resurrected one day (1Thess 4:15,16). Our mortal bodies will then be transformed, becoming immortal and incorruptible (1Cor 15:35-58).

Praise the Lord! As God's sons, we shall be totally transformed – body, soul and spirit. Some day we will live in eternity completely whole, and in the bright and undiluted presence of our Lord and His love!

Until then, we can know God and experience His love. We have the “down payment” of His Spirit living within us. As we grow and mature in Christ, we can know the Lord more deeply, experiencing an ever-increasing measure of His love and His power in and through our lives.

This growth process can and should continue each day of our lives until we at last see Him face to face and know Him fully, even as we are known (1Cor 13:12). What a joy and privilege it is to be an adopted, placed son of the living God. What great joy and promise of inheritance is ours both now and throughout eternity!

“HE MADE US ACCEPTED”

Our privileges as adopted sons and heirs of the living God are truly glorious. We shall have an eternity to sing His marvelous praises for taking unlovable sinners – through His grace and love – and making us His sons. All of this God has done, *“according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Eph 1:5,6).

THE PURPOSE OF OUR ADOPTION

The worship due our God for all eternity is certainly a worthy outcome of our adoption. But there is also a purpose in our adoption as sons that we can live out and give expression to while we live here on earth.

A. DESTINED FOR RELATIONSHIP

The Scriptures reveal that mankind was originally created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27). This includes the fact that mankind was made with the capacity for free will and choice. We are able to think, to feel, to reason, and to make intelligent decisions. We have emotions as well. These are all attributes that are necessary for having normal, healthy relationships.

Ultimately, mankind was made for the glory of God (Rev 4:11). But how was man to bring that glory to God? Was that to be accomplished through the complexity of our design? Or through our intelligence or creativity? Those are all wonderful characteristics God has given us. But they alone do not reveal God's true purpose in creating humanity in His image.

Or perhaps man was to bring glory to God through his service. But did God need more servants? If so, then why wouldn't God simply make more angels? They are stronger, swifter, and without many of our human, fleshly limitations. Certainly mankind has the capacity to serve. But once again, this is not why we are made in the image of God.

SIN DESTROYS RELATIONSHIP

Several Bible passages that we have already studied give us insight into why God created man in His likeness. We read that God chose us in Christ and predestined us to adoption "*before the foundation of the world*" (Eph 1:4). In other words, God in eternity past chose to create us in His image in order that we would be His sons.

God chose to create us the way He did in order *that we might have a loving relationship with Him as our heavenly Father!* We were originally intended to walk and talk with God face to face, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2). You and I were created for relationship – a personal, loving and close relationship with our Creator.

Sadly, Adam and Eve chose to violate that relationship through disobedience and rebellion against God's commands. Thus sin entered our world and began its cruel work upon and within God's creation. Sin always destroys relationships – in marriage, in friendships, in families – but especially between us and a perfect and holy God.

OUR CLEARLY DESIGNED DESTINY

Sin and its consequence of death threatened to ruin God's plans for His creation. But God very quickly set in motion His redemptive plan (Gen 3:15). Though it would take centuries to completely unfold, it was perfect in its design and timing.

At just the right moment in history – after the Law had been used as a tutor to reveal to mankind his desperate need for God (Gal 3:23-25) – God sent His Son to take upon Himself the death penalty for all the sins of mankind (John 3:16). This perfect and unblemished Lamb became the sacrifice for all (Isa 53; 2Cor 5:15; 1Pet 1:18-21). Then Jesus Christ rose from the dead to reign forevermore as our Living Lord and Savior!

All those who believe in and receive Jesus, the Living Savior, have their sins forgiven. Because the sins of the repentant sinner are removed from him as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12), there is no longer the separation caused by sin between the sinner and his Creator God.

Thus the sinner is made an adopted son and is restored to what God originally intended – to have a personal relationship with Him as the heavenly Father. That is God's clearly designed destiny for every person – and that is why we must carry this Gospel message into all the world!

PASTOR TO PASTOR

Pastors, our busy lives and ministries can often lead to the neglect of our personal relationship with God. Our *"first love"* (Rev 2:4) becomes the work of ministry, or perhaps something else. All of our time and effort is devoted to things other than our relationship with the Lord.

None of us intends to neglect God. But slowly, as our ministry grows and our lives become full, we find ourselves spending less and less time with the Lord. Our prayer life becomes focused on asking for things we want, blessings for us or anointing to do well, instead of just sitting at the feet of our Savior to be with Him. We study God's Word only to get a good sermon, rather than to simply commune with Him and feed ourselves spiritually.

Many pastors fall into this trap. It is no wonder that they begin to "burn out", asking: "Why do I feel so dry spiritually? Where is my sense of call and vision? Why does Jesus seem so far away? Where is God in my life? Why does ministry feel like an outward performance, and not something vital and alive that is coming from my heart?"

Do any of those questions sound familiar to you? Each of us must be careful to protect and actively strengthen our relationship with God, and grow in that relationship. Without fresh, daily communion with Him and fresh *manna* from His Word, we will quickly become weakened spiritually. When we are weak, we are much easier targets for demonic attacks. We then have less strength to resist and overcome our flesh (Rom 13:14; Gal 5:16; Eph 4:27; 6:10-18). Inevitably, compromise and failure will soon follow.

But most tragic will be the loss of the close relationship with God for which you were created. He longs for you (Jas 4:5), and you desperately need Him. There is no other relationship or activity in this life that is more important than walking and talking with your Heavenly Father every day! This is true for you, and also for those whom you lead.

OUR DOOR OF ACCESS

Mankind was created for relationship with our Creator, God our Father. When sin destroyed that possibility, God sent His Son to take the death penalty for our sin. Jesus' sacrifice for us reopened the door to God that sin had closed.

The Temple worship of Jesus' day included a secluded place, the holy of holies. Only the high priest could enter there to speak to God on behalf of the people (Heb 9:6-9). It was covered by a large, thick tapestry known as the veil.

The Bible reveals that when Jesus died, the veil in the Temple that covered the holy of holies was supernaturally torn in two (Mark 15:38). The splitting open of this heavy, woven veil *from top to bottom* signifies to us that through Christ's death, a door of access had been opened *by God* between Himself and all of mankind once again!

RECONCILIATION

“For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom 5:10). The word “reconcile” means *to change, re-establish or restore a relationship*. Again we see that Christ's sacrificial work established the possibility of our reconciliation to God.

This reconciliation is available to any person who believes on Christ for salvation (Eph 2:8-13; Rom 10:13). A close relationship with God is possible for any believer in Christ. But this reconciliation also provides a second important purpose.

B. DESTINED TO BE AMBASSADORS

As adopted sons of God, we have been sovereignly placed by God the Father into the mature position of sonship. We are *“heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ”* (Rom 8:17).

This tremendous position of privilege also brings with it tremendous responsibilities. One of the prime responsibilities for every believer while on the earth is to reveal the Gospel – the eternal salvation and restored relationship to God that is available only through faith in Christ.

Every believer has the command and the privilege to tell others what God, through Christ, has done for them. It makes no difference the age, gender, calling or spiritual maturity – it is the responsibility of every Christian to tell others about Jesus!

Paul the apostle explained it this way to the church in Corinth, and for us today: *“Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God”* (2Cor 5:18-20).

Every one of us is to be an ambassador for Christ. Our adoption requires far more of us than to just sit and rejoice in our own salvation and position as a son. We have a mission from our heavenly Father. That mission is to implore others to be reconciled to God, and to tell them how that is done – only by salvation through Jesus Christ.

This mission is Jesus’ final command to all of His followers: *“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age’”* (Matt 28:18-20; see also Mark 16:15).

Paul the apostle dedicated his life to this great purpose (1Cor 9:19-27; Col 1:24-29), as have countless other believers through the ages. And we today must do no less!

OUR FATHER'S WILL

Our greatest privilege and joy as God's adopted sons is to reveal the love of God that is available through Jesus Christ to others. Our message includes: *"the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2Pet 3:9); *"whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Rom 10:13); and, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

God told His first created son, Adam, to *"be fruitful and multiply"* and to be a steward of all that God had given him to care for (Gen 1:26-28; 2:8,15). God's will for us is very similar, but now has this added dimension: *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples... You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you"* (John 15:8,16).

The "fruit" that we are to bear and that is eternal in nature is the fruit of *people – those who are brought to salvation through Christ*. We are to multiply the sons that are restored to God through salvation. We cannot save anyone by our own power. But we are given the *message* of salvation, and God gives us the power of the Spirit to deliver it with boldness! He will confirm the Gospel with signs and wonders following (Mark 16:17,18; 1Thess 1:5).

We are the adopted sons who are also called to be preachers of the Gospel (Rom 10:14,15). It is our Father's will that every born-again person faithfully share the Good News of salvation through Christ with any person who will listen.

We must study the Word of God, and prepare to answer the questions that unbelievers might have (2Tim 4:1-5; 1Pet 3:14-17). We must also love and serve those who are needy in Christ's name, showing very practically how much God loves people. These are all ways of sharing the Gospel, the Good News of God's love and salvation in Christ.

As God's adopted sons, we are given the privilege and responsibility to fulfill our heavenly Father's will. This does not earn for us our adoption, prove our worthiness to receive it, or make God love us more than He already does (Luke 17:10; Rom 5:1-10; 1John 3:1-3).

We do not serve our Father in order to gain the privilege or position of sonship; that is already ours in Christ. But we serve *because* we are accepted as His sons. **We are not sons because we serve; we serve because we are sons!**

CONCLUSION- ADOPTION: HEIRS OF GOD!

Almighty God, our Creator and heavenly Father, has chosen you to be His son in full standing once you receive salvation through Jesus Christ. Thus you are also His heir to all the privileges, provision, promises and power – NOW, and in the Kingdom of God yet to come! Glory to God!

Take a moment even now, lifting your head and your hands to the Lord. Thank Him out loud that you are His son. Declare that truth to the natural realm, and to the supernatural realm – to everything that would oppose this truth being realized fully in your life.

You are not an unwanted child. If you have received Christ's salvation, you are not unworthy to be a beloved son of God. The blood of Christ has cleansed you of sin and made you worthy to receive. It has broken down the wall of separation between you and God, and you can have close fellowship with your heavenly Father.

There is no question in *God's* mind and heart about your position and standing before Him as a son. So let no question or doubt enter *your* mind about that either! God loves you with an everlasting love. He has set His love and favor upon you in eternity past; and once you are saved, there is nothing in this world or in the spiritual realm that can change that!

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38,39).

GO FORTH WITH COURAGE!

It is up to each of us to choose to begin to live like the fully loved and empowered son that each of us is! Every believer in Christ has been set in the position of the mature son and heir by God's unswerving and unchangeable will (John 1:12,13).

Therefore, let each of us begin to live each day with confidence, knowing that our standing with God is secure. Study the Word of God and learn all that God has given you as an inheritance in this life, and in the life to come. Pray daily and commune with your heavenly Father, getting to know Him more and more and letting His Spirit make you more like Jesus in your character and behavior.

Let your faith rise to believe God for the provision and power you need to do what your Father is doing (John 5:19) and to say what your Father is saying (John 7:17,18) – in order that you might lead the church of God according to the Father's will.

Reject all fear, doubt and uncertainty as to who you are in Christ, and regarding His calling upon your life. Embrace fully the leading of the Holy Spirit and His will for you, as you set your hand to the plow and never look back. You have been destined by God – and given everything you need – to be *“more than a conqueror through Him who loved us”* (Rom 8:37).

You are an adopted son of God. You have every privilege and every responsibility that comes with this blessed position. So rejoice and go forth with courage, faith and hope – for God your Father is *for* you and *with* you! Amen!