

Romans 8:12-30 Our Adoption as God's Children

All believers have received the gift of the Spirit, called here the 'Spirit of adoption', by whom we cry "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). The Spirit in us witnesses with our spirit that we really are God's children (Romans 8:16). God wants children! Paul picks up on this biblical theme in 2Corinthians 6:16-18 where he quotes Scripture, *I will be their God, and they shall be my people, and, I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.*

God's purpose is to have children, and in the big scheme of things this is more important than salvation, although we cannot become His children without salvation. Romans 8:12-30 has a lot to say about God making us His children.

Romans 8:29 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*

The NRSV says, *in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family,* and He does this by adopting us into His great big family. Anyone who has been through the process of adoption knows that it isn't an automatic process: we are not automatically a child of God just because we are a human being. We must to repent from our sins and trust in Christ. So Paul uses the idea of adoption as another way to explain the way believers have been restored to God's favour in Christ (Romans 5:10).

In Jewish law and tradition, family and looking after the orphan, widow (and refugees) was top priority (Deuteronomy 10:18). An orphaned child would normally be looked after by the wider family, and it wasn't a legal contract. The prime biblical example is Esther who was brought up by her uncle Mordecai. The Jews placed great value on young human life, receiving it as a gift from God. Abortion and infanticide were considered to be equivalent to murder.

In Roman law and tradition adoption was common, but different. It was based on a legal contract and it was especially common in order to provide a male heir for a family which had no sons. Therefore adoption was usually of a boy, and a boy who was more often than not a young adult. As an adopted son he had equal status to the natural child and was an heir. Young human life was much less valued, and abortion and infanticide were common.

Paul is writing to Greek speaking believers in Rome who understood the Roman view of adoption. I think Paul was illustrating that we have been legally adopted into God's family, and are heirs, of God, and co-heirs with our older brother Jesus. Yet Paul's thinking was thoroughly Jewish. He understood the value God places on each human life (which we call the sanctity of life,) even from the moment of conception. Psalm 139:13-15 shows that God was involved with our formation in an intricate way. We may understand much of the biology involved, but can we explain why each unique personality is formed? Jesus illustrated the value of each human life, noting that God remembers each sparrow, and numbers all the hairs on our heads (Luke 12:6-7). God valued each human life so much that He sent His own Son to die for our sins that we may be adopted into his great big family.

Clearly God has a very positive view of adoption, and He is in the business of adopting lots and lots of children into His family. Jesus said, *I will not leave you as orphans* (John 14:18).

If adoption was more respected these days, and easier, it would be a major solution to the problem of abortion. Mothers who don't want their babies, or who just feel they can't cope, could put the child out for adoption without feeling ashamed. And the child could grow up grateful that they have adoptive parents who chose them and loved them. This wouldn't eliminate abortion but it would significantly

reduce it. In the same way we are eternally grateful we have been transferred by God our Father from the realm of sin and death to the realm of the kingdom of God and blessing. For anyone has had an abortion and regrets it, know that there is nothing in our lives that God cannot redeem, no area where he cannot bring healing, and the child is safe in heaven.

There is a Christian Organisation established a few years ago called Home For Good. Its main aim is to encourage Christians to foster and adopt children, and to help make the process easier. There are about 15,000 children in the UK waiting for a home; and there are about 15,000 evangelical churches in the UK. In theory the problem could be solved if just one family from each church fostered or adopted a child, and the parents would have the support of a loving church. Home for Good are now also arranging for the fostering of refugee children. This is a really important ministry.

God values adoption and Christians are His adopted children. But the process isn't complete yet,

Romans 8:23 *We ourselves who have the firstfruits of the Spirit groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.*

The process will only be complete when our whole bodies are redeemed on Resurrection Day. The life to come is more than just our spirits floating away into nether nether land. That idea has more to do with eastern religions. Christians believe in redemption of the spirit, soul and body. The prophets look forward to that Day.

Job said, *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth* (see Job 19:25-27). The Redeemer (Jesus) has stood upon the earth as a Suffering Servant, yet we believe He will come again a second time as Lord of Glory. Job continued, *And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.* Job held the hope of bodily resurrection in his heart. He continues, *My heart faints within me!* In Paul's language *Job groans inwardly as he waits eagerly for adoption as a son, the redemption of his body* (Romans 8:23).

David also looked forward to the Day of bodily resurrection, and prophesied concerning the resurrection of the Messiah (Psalm 16:9-10). This is the hope which is unseen, for which we wait patiently and by which we are saved (Romans 8:24-25).

Jesus' resurrection wasn't just an idea, or even just a spiritual thing: it was of course a bodily resurrection. The Scripture testifies that Jesus appeared in flesh and blood form to His disciples and over 500 others. One could have made it up, but it's very unlikely that such a huge crowd would make it up. Then Jesus ascended to heaven from the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). The angels said He would come back in the same way. Zechariah prophesied that the Day of the Lord, (known only to the Lord,) will be a unique day, with neither day nor night, and then the Lord stand on the Mount of Olives to be king over all the earth (Zechariah 14:4,7,9). In Jewish tradition, when Messiah comes the Mount of Olives will be the place where the judgment of the nations and the resurrection will begin. This is why there are so many people buried on the Mount of Olives!

Today the signs of Christ's coming are clear (Matthew 24), and history in the present age is heading up towards its climax when the Lord comes again. We don't know the details of how it will all work out. But the important thing is to be assured that through faith in Christ we have been adopted into God's great big family. We have the firstfruits of the Spirit, a taste and the guarantee of the future we hope and wait for (Ephesians 1:13-14).