

“God With Us” (part 4)

Galatians 4:4-5

Carle Zimmerman was a distinguished historian and sociologist who taught for many years at Harvard University. In 1947, he published a book entitled “Family and Civilization” in which he demonstrated the close connections between the rise and fall of the family and the rise and fall of civilizations, particularly ancient Greece and Rome, medieval and modern Europe, and the United States. Zimmerman traced the evolution of family structure from tribes and clans to extended and broken families of today. He pointed out the consequences of each structure for the bearing and rearing of children; for religion, law, and everyday life; and for the fate of civilization itself.

He predicted many of today’s cultural and social controversies and trends, including youth violence and depression, abortion and homosexuality, the demographic collapse of Europe and of the West. He recorded his keen observations as he compared the disintegration of various cultures with the parallel decline of family life in those cultures. Eight specific patterns of domestic behavior typified the downward spiral of each culture Zimmerman studied.

- Marriage loses its sacredness and is frequently broken by divorce.
- Traditional meaning of the marriage ceremony is lost.
- Feminist movements abound.
- Increased public disrespect for parents and authority in general.
- Acceleration of juvenile delinquency, promiscuity, and rebellion.
- Refusal of people with traditional marriages to accept family responsibilities.
- Growing desire for and acceptance of adultery.
- Increasing interest in and spread of sexual perversions and sex-related crimes.

Family life is not what it used to be, and society is feeling the consequences of such a tragic breakdown. In fact, there are four words that come to mind to describe the state of our society:

- Immorality

- Injustice
- Isolation

An article came out in Newsweek Magazine some time back, and the headline caught my attention—“Lonely Planet: Isolation Increases in U.S.” According to the writer:

Newsweek (8-20-09) - *“There are more than 300 million of us in the United States, and sometimes it seems like we’re all friends on Facebook. But the sad truth is that Americans are lonelier than ever. Between 1985 and 2004, the number of people who said there was no one with whom they discussed important matters tripled, to 25 percent, according to Duke University researchers...Social networking sites like Facebook may provide people with a false sense of connection that ultimately increases loneliness in people who feel alone. These sites should serve as a supplement, but not a replacement for, face-to-face interaction.”*

- Insecurity

In the minds of many in our society, there are no absolute standards of right and wrong. Instead, all truth is relative and what matters is a person’s personal happiness. Yet with the rise of this type of thinking comes rampant insecurity. People need to belong, but they are skeptical, afraid to trust, and uncertain in life.

Because our world is characterized by immorality, injustice, isolation, and insecurity, we who live in it need the righteousness of God, the unity of the church, the fellowship of a heavenly Father, and the security that comes through knowing Christ. In a word, sinful men and women need to be adopted into the family of God.

The biblical truth of adoption is one of the most precious doctrines we have as the children of God. Just to be called a “child of God” is a wonderful blessing. Because I am now in the family of God, I have a new relationship with God. No longer is He just a distant being; He is now my Father. This speaks of tender relationship.

In a day when people feel alone and families are so broken and our nation is so divided, what a wonderful gift adoption into the family of God is.

Adoption means that we are given the status as sons! Adoption means a person is given a new name, a new life, and a new future. To illustrate:

Leslie Lynch King, Jr. was born on Monday, July 14, 1913 in Omaha, Nebraska. His parents separated sixteen days after his birth and were divorced the following December. His father, Leslie Lynch King Sr, was an abusive man and had a severe drinking problem. His mother took her baby and moved back to her parents' home in Grand Rapids, Michigan where she later married a paint salesman who later adopted young Leslie and gave him his own name. There is a good chance that you have never heard of Leslie Lynch King, but I'm sure you are familiar with the name Gerald Ford, the 38th president of the United States.

He was born one person with one name, but through adoption he was given a new name and a new life.

Adoption is the heart of the gospel message.

The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men could become the sons of God. The incarnation happened so that our redemption and adoption could happen. Paul explains in verse 5:

4. Jesus is the PROVIDED Son through whom we are adopted

"...to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons."

Paul uses the metaphor of adoption to describe the relationship believers have with God through the saving work of Jesus Christ. (Key texts are Romans 8, Galatians 4, Ephesians 1)

Adoption is something that we receive through faith in Jesus Christ

Simply defined, adoption is the legal act of permanently placing a child with a parent or parents other than the birth parents. Adoption results in the severing of the parental responsibilities and rights of the biological parents and the placing of those responsibilities and rights onto the adoptive parents. After the finalization of an adoption, there is no legal difference between biological and adopted children.

In a number of places, the New Testament uses the word adoption to describe how we come into God's family.

Romans 8:15 - "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba! Father!"

Ephesians 1:5 - “In love He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will.”

However, the meaning is not exactly the same as our common English usage. The Greek word for adoption means to place as a son within a family with full family privileges as an adult member of the family. That’s the background of Paul’s thought in Galatians 4:1-7.

“Adoption” - *the word is a compound term that literally means the placing of a son; it refers to a man’s giving the status of sonship to someone who is not his natural child*

Verses 1-2 describe a common situation in the first century. Imagine a son whose father is extremely wealthy. One day the son will inherit the entire estate for himself. Under Roman law, because he is a minor child, being raised as a minor child, he is treated no differently than a slave. He is heir to all that his father owns, but while he is growing up he has no more rights than a slave does. Although he will one day inherit the whole estate, he is subject to guardians and managers who watch over him until the time set by his father. Although he is an heir, he is treated as a slave until the time his father decides to set him free.

Paul is making the point here that this was our condition under the law where we were enslaved to its demands. Rather than sons, we are slaves. When Christ comes and provides redemption and by grace through faith we are set free, we then receive the adoption as sons.

Adoption means that in Jesus Christ our status has been changed. No longer am I in bondage to the law, and no longer is it about my performance. No longer do I rely upon my effort for salvation. Now, I am a son who receives my inheritance.

John 1:12-13 - “But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Paul is showing us in verse 4 how God came to us in the person of His Son to redeem us and to adopt us into His family. To redeem means to set free from slavery by the payment of a price. You redeemed a slave by paying the purchase price and then setting him free. But more than redeeming us, He has also changed our status. In addition to freeing that slave, this would be the equivalent if you also said to him, “Come with me to my home and live with me. I want you to legally join my family, take my name, and take an equal share in my inheritance.”

As amazing as this sounds, this is what God did for us the moment we trusted Christ. He set us free from the slavery of sin with the purchase price of the blood of Christ. Then, He brought us into his family and gave us “full rights” as His own children. The concept of “full rights” means that there are no second-class children in the family of God.

Most people view adoption as if we have to overcome the fact that we are orphans in order for God to adopt us, as if we have to deserve our adoption before we receive it. Yet nothing could be further from the truth. Sonship in the family of God is not a matter of my goodness, but is instead a matter of His grace.

My sonship is announced by God the Father:

Ephesians 1:3-6 - “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 as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved.”

My sonship is accomplished by God the Son:

Galatians 4:4-5 - “When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

My sonship is applied by God the Holy Spirit:

Romans 8:15 - “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption. And by Him we cry, Abba! Father!”

My sonship is anticipated by the whole creation:

Romans 8:18-19 - “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God...And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

My redemption in Christ and adoption into God's family is solely on the basis of God's grace, and is therefore received in faith.

D.L. Moody told the story about a young man who left the Confederate army and joined the Union. One day, letters came for everyone in his division except for him. He told a fellow soldier, "I wish I was dead; no one cares for me. My mother is dead, and my father would not own me now because I've joined the Northern cause." Another young man wrote and told his own mother of this, and in a few days a letter came addressed to the stranger. He told the chaplain, "It isn't for me; nobody would write to me." But it was for him, and it began this way: "My dear son." The mother of his comrade wrote him that she wanted him to be her son, and she would be his mother. Upon reading this, the young man cried out, "Boy's, I've got a mamma!" And you can bet that when the war was over, no one was more eager to see his new mamma than that pitiful boy.

Thus, adoption is on the basis of my Father's grace rather than my own goodness. It is something that is received freely in Jesus Christ.

1 John 3:1 - "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the children of God."

Adoption is something that we recognize through the Holy Spirit

Notice what Paul goes on to say in the next verse:

Galatians 4:6 - "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father!"

When we come to Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us new life and the assurance that we are God's children. This is the still, small voice of God that speaks to the soul and whispers, "You are now a child of God." That same Holy Spirit within us cries out "Abba, Father."

"Abba" - *comes from an Aramaic word that little children would use to speak to their fathers; an intimate, personal word of endearing affection*

In English you might say “Dad” or “Daddy.” It’s a very tender way of talking to our Heavenly Father. No longer is he some distant God up in the sky. No longer is He some remote being with whom we are disconnected. Now, He is our Abba, Father.

God confirms that believers are His adopted sons and daughters through the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings us into a personal and intimate relationship with our heavenly Father.

Romans 8:16 - “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

The fact that a believer has an intimate relationship with God and can cry out with confidence to Him as Father is proof of sonship.

Adoption is something that we reflect as we live like God’s children

Notice what Paul writes beginning in verse 7:

Galatians 4:7-9 - “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”

The gracious gift of sonship is free, but it brings serious obligation to those who have received it. I have been adopted into the family of God and am to reflect my adoption as an act of worship and witness.

Adoption means that you have a new life and a new identity. I have been given a new family. The old is gone forever. The old master is gone forever. The old name is gone forever. God is your Father, the Lord Jesus is your Savior, and the Holy Spirit lives within you.

Adoption means that you have new privileges. You have the same right as the oldest saints of God. The same status that has been conferred upon one is conferred upon another.

Galatians 3:26-28 - “For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Adoption means you have a new responsibility. What God says to any believer he says to every believer. The same Holy Spirit who is given to the seasoned Christian is given to the brand new Christian. No one need feel like a second class citizen.

1 John 3:1-3 - “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called the children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know Him. Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who thus hopes in Him purifies himself as He is pure.”

What does all this mean? Because you have received adoption in Jesus Christ:

- You are rich now
- You have the Holy Spirit
- You have access to God
- You have brothers and sisters
- You have spiritual gifts
- You have been set free from Satan’s power
- You have a new family

Physical adoption gives a child a new name, a new home, a new address, a new life and a new future. The same is true with God’s adoption of us. It gives the child of God a new name, a new home, a new address, a new life and a new future.

I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God!

Taken together, all of this that we read about in Galatians 4:4-5, this is the meaning of Christmas and Immanuel—God With Us. A Son was promised who would make many sons, a Son of God to make many sons of God. Charles Wesley wrote about it:

Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace!

Hail the Son of Righteousness!

Light and life to all He brings

*Risen with healing in His wings
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
Glory to the newborn King!*