

LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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ABBA! FATHER, WE HAVE BEEN ADOPTED

“Abba” is a word used only three times in Scripture and it is always used in reference to God as “Father”. Jesus praying in Gethsemane that the cup be removed from him addresses God as “Abba! Father” (Mark 14:36). The Apostle Paul in Romans 8:15 states: “you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out ‘Abba! Father.’” Again in Galatians 4:6 it is said: “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father.’” When Paul uses the word it is connected with our adoption as sons. Joachim Jeremias in *The Prayers of Christ* says: “Abba was an everyday word, a homely family word. No Jew would have dared to address God in this manner; Jesus did it in prayer.” Kittel’s *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* says the word “Abba” in “Jewish usage shows how this Father-child relationship to God far surpasses any possibilities of intimacy assumed in Judaism, introducing indeed something which is wholly new.”

The Apostle Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the words “adoption” and “Abba” in referring to our being children or sons of God, and in both passages uses it in reference to our addressing God as Father. It is an awesome thing to realize we are actually the sons (children) of God. Before the ascension of Christ the Scriptures refer to only two people as being a “son of God”, that is Adam (Luke 3:38) and Christ (Matt. 3:17, 17:5). (I take the “sons of God in Genesis 6:2,4 to be angels, not men, II Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). However after his ascension it is said that Christ is “bringing many sons into glory” (Heb. 2:10) and “now we are the children of God” (I John 3:2). I.J. Packer wrote in *Evangelical Magazine*: “You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament teaching if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means he does not understand Christianity very well.”

It is sad that some people in life only know “father” as a drunkard or an abuser. In these cases, I suppose, it is hard for them to grasp the concept of God being our Father, but we do not have to compare God with earthly fathers to know what it means to have God as our Father. Three times in the epistles we have the statement “Blessed by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (II Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3; I Pet. 1:3). God as the Father of Christ shows us what it is for us to have God as our Father. God intends the lives of believers to be a reflection and reproduction of Jesus’ own fellowship with Him. The Apostle says “Be imitators (followers) of me just as I also am of Christ” (I Cor. 11:1). He further says: “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf (in His stead KJV), of Christ, be reconciled to God.” At one time God had only one Son on the earth, now he has “many sons”, and “you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). To be a son or child of God means that we are to physically take

the place of Christ on the earth and represent the Father as he represented Him while he was on earth. God is revealed as “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in order that we may know what kind of God and Father He is. The word “Abba” indicates the close relation the child has with the Father.

To become a child of God one must experience a new birth. John 1:12,13: “But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.” John 3:3: “Jesus answered and said to him ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.’” The Apostle Peter states: “you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God” (I Pet 1:23). We become children, sons of God, by a new birth, a birth from above. This relationship is born out of God’s love. “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. Beloved now we are the children of God...” (I John 3:1,2).

When we turn to the epistles we find we are not only children of God by a new birth but we find the word “adoption” being used. We then ask the question: are we sons of God by birth or by adoption? “Adoption” is a Roman word used to show legal status of a child. Rousas Rushdoony in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* writes: “The Biblical usage of the word *adoption* is theological, having reference to our adoption in Christ as sons of God. The Biblical usage reflected a fact of family life. Adoption in antiquity normally differed from the modern practice in that usually mature men were formally adopted as heirs.” Although adoption was a Roman term and the word does not appear in the Old Testament, it may be that Abraham asking God for Eliezer to be his heir illustrates Rusdoony’s point. Being adopted is not to make us a Christian, our spiritual birth does this. Adoption is God putting us into the positions of sons and heirs. Paul seems to make a distinction between being redeemed and receiving the adoption as sons. (Gal. 4:5). Adoption is not putting us into the family but putting us in a certain position, a legal status as an heir. We do not become “children of God” by adoption, but by birth. Adoption declares our position and pictures us as sons.

Adoption is a word used only by the Apostle Paul. He uses the word four times in reference to the Christian and one time in reference to Israel. We will address the references to Christians.

(1) Romans 8:15: “For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out ‘Abba! Father.’” The “spirit of slavery” describes both the old life of the Jew under the law and our old life before conversion. This was a life of fear, seeing God only as the Judge and forbidding man to approach Him because of his sin and rebellion. This life was and is characterized by a spirit of slavery which leads to this fear. Paul describes this life of slavery as our being “dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of

disobedience. Among them we too all formerly lived in the lust of our flesh, indulging in the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:1-3). That is all changed and “all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). He then shows this is not a spirit of slavery leading to fear, rather it is “the spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’” (ver 15). Freedom not fear now rules our lives and we now have full access to God as our Abba! Father. He then shows that our adoption as children makes us “heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ” (ver 17). Notice we are heirs *of* God and joint-heirs *with* Christ. Deuteronomy 18:2 states that the Levites “shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the Lord is their inheritance.” They had a unique relationship with God that the other tribes did not have. They were the only tribe having access to God through the ritual of sacrifice and service in the tabernacle. Our being heirs of God means we have unique access to God that none in the Old Testament could in any way visualize. The Hebrew writer tell us “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus” and we can “draw near in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:19,22). The “holy place” is “heaven itself” (Heb. 9:24). Since we are heirs of God we have full and free access to heaven and the throne of God.

Being “fellow-heirs” (“joint-heirs” KJV) with Christ means we share with Christ everything given him by God. In this passage Paul is stating we are joint-heirs with Christ relative to suffering. If Christ had to suffer we also inherit that suffering, but if Christ was raised to life and glory we also inherit that life and glory. That which Christ inherited, and inherits, we also inherit. Not only will we share with Christ all that the Father has in store for him, in the love and fore-knowledge of the Father, He has made us sharers in that which Christ did to redeem us. When Christ was crucified our old self was crucified with him (Rom. 6:6), so his death was our death; “For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died” (II Cor. 5:14). Not only do we share in his death, we have been “raised up with Him and seated with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Thus we share in his resurrection and ascension. As if this were not enough, it is stated that “When Christ appears, then we will also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). No surprise that Paul says “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

(2) Galatians 4:5,6: God sent forth His son “that He might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons, and because we are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of His son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father.’” God redeemed us, not only that we might become His sons, but that we might receive the adoption as sons. To be redeemed is to be a son of God, but to be adopted is to become an heir. God has not only redeemed us but has made us heirs. To be redeemed is to be set free from the slavery of sin and become a son of God, to be adopted is to become an heir. This means we are heir to all the promises of God. In this context Paul is showing our adoption is in relation to the promises of God made to Abraham. Gal. 3:14 states that the promise was that “we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” 3:16 shows the promise was to Abraham and “his seed, that is, Christ”. The last verse (29) says “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.” Our adoption means we are heirs to all the promises that are in Christ. Romans 4:13 says “The promise to Abraham or his seed that he would be heir to the

world was through the righteousness of faith.” Heir to the world! Paul further explains this: “All things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God.” (I Cor. 3:21,22) .

(3) Ephesians 1:5: “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.” We were not “predestined to go to heaven or hell” rather we are predestined to adoption as sons. Our adoption is the highest expression of God’s love toward His children. John said “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God, and such we are” (I John 3:1). This predestination includes our obtaining an inheritance (Eph. 1:11), and the Holy Spirit is given as a pledge of our inheritance (ver 14). As children of God we have within us the same Spirit that was in His Son, which raised him from the dead and gives us life in our mortal bodies (Rom. 8:11). Not only do we have the Spirit, we have the mind of Christ! (I Cor. 2:16). Ours is the kingdom of heaven, and we shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:3,5). The world has nothing comparable to this. I am amazed to see so many churches today emulating the world to try to win the world. The fact is we shall someday judge the world (I Cor. 6:2). If that is hard to grasp, try this: “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” (I Cor. 6:3). The second chapter of Hebrews deals with the fact that Christ was made for a little while lower than the angels, but God has raised him up to a position higher than the angels and this means that not only His only begotten Son is higher than the angels, but his adopted sons are higher than the angels. In fact angels are “ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation. (Heb. 1:14). Angels are “greater in might and power” than the strongest opposition brought against the church (II Pet. 2:11) yet we as sons of God have been given a greater position than the angels. There is no position in the celestial hierarchy higher than the position of Son. Jesus is the “only begotten Son of God, and we are born and adopted sons of God which makes us as much a son of God as Jesus, even if in a different way.

Romans 8:23: “And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.” Even though we have already been adopted by God (15) and are children of God (16) there is yet another aspect of our adoption as sons which is future, that is the redemption of our bodies. Our being adopted as sons of God has given us “every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ” (Eph. 1:3) and “His divine power has granted to us all things pertaining to life and godliness” (II Pet.1:3), yet there is one thing we do not have; that is: “the redemption of our body”. Paul shows that the entire creation was “subjected to vanity” and is waiting for its redemption. The earth was subjected to a curse because of man’s sin, and Paul makes it plain that this earth is going to be redeemed, not destroyed. The whole creation is “groaning and suffering the pains of childbirth” as it waits for its redemption, which will come at the “revealing of the sons of God” (8:19, 22). The sons of God will be revealed when Christ is revealed in glory (Col. 3:4). Just as the creation is groaning and waiting for the curse to be lifted, so the Christian is also waiting eagerly for that time which will be the final phase of his adoption as a child of God. Paul calls this “the redemption of our body” (ver 23). Our “inner man” has been redeemed, we are in fact sons of God and someday our “outer man” (II Cor.4:16,17) will be redeemed. Then our Adoption will be complete.

