

ADOPTED IN THE BELOVED

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March 3, 2012

How could one ever learn to love a devil? A problem has emerged. American couples wishing to adopt children have gone to Russia or other East European countries and brought back orphans they have adopted. In some cases these children have exhibited a horrendous spirit, lashing out at everyone around them and their adoptive parents, even tried to attack and destroy themselves. One Christian couple who adopted such an orphan are accused of murdering the child when they maintain he actually killed himself. Adoptive parents report that sometimes these orphans give evidence of being devil-possessed.

Nurtured since birth in cold, unloving, impersonal rigidity, the children are alienated from everything in the universe. Some have witnessed or experienced brutal violence. They are psychotic. The adoptive parents want to love them; but how do you learn to love a devil?

It may be ever so easy for us arm-chair experts to say that the adoptive parents must be kind and patient, and that love and reason will win. But it leaves one wondering how anyone could gain the victory in an emotional battle such as these parents are experiencing!

All this comes home to each of us as we ponder everyone's problem: how can we learn to love people who demonstrate satanic attitudes? With no desire to criticize the adoptive parents who say they are driven almost out of their minds (could we do better in their circumstances?), we must believe that love is

stronger than hatred, light is stronger than darkness, grace is stronger than sin, the atonement of Christ is stronger than alienation. But ah yes, one must understand that the love we are talking about is not our poor self-centered human love; it is *agape*, the very nature of God Himself, who so loved a hateful world that He gave His only begotten Son. If we don't believe that, there is no hope for this dark world. Perhaps these troubled parents need to know about that *agape*. Who will tell them if not the church?

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3).

The word "blessed" simply means "happy." It is often translated so in the *Today's English Version*—in this instance as "Let us give thanks ..." To hear us say "thanks" to the Father makes Him happy, too. It's a new thought to many that it is in our power to make God happy. (You end up becoming happy, too!)

Who are the "us" who are so blessed?

Of course, the believers in Christ, the "saints"! But there is a real sense in which the "us" means also the entire human race. Jesus is "the Savior of *the world*" (John 4:42), "the Savior of *all men*, especially of those who believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). Paul distinguishes between two concepts of Christ being "Savior"—one that applies to "all men," those who worship Him and those who don't; and the other that applies to believers.

"All men" should "bless the Lord" because it is Christ who "gives life to *the world*," and therefore the life they already have He has given to them. Jesus said, "the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of *the world*" (John

6:33, 51). If you are a person in the world, you should therefore give thanks to the Lord!

The “life” that anyone experiences, believer or unbeliever, is the purchase of the sacrifice of Christ. In that *legal* or *corporate* sense, “all men” are “in Christ,” because Christ is the second or “last Adam” who has become the new Head of the entire human race. Now when the repenting sinner believes, the legal sense becomes experiential.

As believers, those who respond to His message of love are “in Christ” *experientially*.

The good news of the gospel gets better and better! Christ has given *us* “every spiritual blessing” to make *us* happy! Paul meant that any pagans were free to read his letter, believe it, and then rejoice forever more “in Christ.”

Much of this letter to the Ephesians is taken up with telling us what Christ *has* accomplished for us before we were even born. This can be described as the *objective* gospel—that is, what we had nothing to do with. It’s all done outside of us.

The other portion is concerned with what we do, what we accomplish. It’s not that in even one percent we save ourselves—God forbid the idea! But this part of the letter is concerned with what the objective gospel accomplishes *in* us. This that Christ does now can be described as the *subjective* gospel.

They are a modern attempt to help us visualize the two complementary gospel truths that keep coming up throughout the Bible. To confuse and mix them always produces confusion whether salvation is through faith or by works. To avoid being confused

requires that we understand and appreciate the objective gospel—what Christ has already accomplished in a legal sense for the world.

In chapter one of Ephesians the apostle almost loses himself in his efforts to do justice to the grand dimensions of what Christ did. No language, his or ours, has words adequate to portray it. The quality of our Christian experience, our happiness in Christian living, and our fruitfulness, depend on how adequately we grasp this reality of truth. Grasp only a smattering and we are mired in spiritual frustrations. Learn to “glory” in it all, to appreciate it, then “the world has been crucified to [us] and [we] to the world” (Gal. 6:14). A thousand weary ups and downs in following Jesus become one unending triumph.

Paul is anticipating his later extravagant assessments in chapter 3 where he describes “the riches of His glory” revealed in “the width and length and depth and height [of] … the love of Christ which passes knowledge.” He is confident that the Lord will yet “do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”

Before we are immersed in Paul’s extensive portrayal of wonders, we must note briefly his underlying idea that lets it all come into focus. He holds this rarely seen foundation truth—the death that Christ died on His cross was the equivalent of the world’s second death. Those who believe in the teaching of natural immortality of the soul are automatically deprived of clearly understanding this insight—that Christ actually died on that cross. Even though they pronounce the expressions about

the cross, the idea of dying our second death has to elude them. Learned commentaries generally do not recognize this profound insight. It sets free the soaring concepts that Paul wants to express.

But someone may question: "If Christ was resurrected the third day, how could His death on the cross have been the second death? There's no resurrection after that one!"

This can be understood if we recognize how "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), not eternal life, and not a mere sleep in a weekend vacation. It was our second death that Christ "took," and He had to endure it 100% or it couldn't be true that He "died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3). He must "taste death for everyone" (Heb. 2:9). It is meaningless to say that He tasted our first death, for everybody dies that death (which is only a sleep, 1 Thess. 4:15-17). Scripture becomes clear when we realize that whatever death Jesus died, He "tasted" it for "all men" so that none of us need ever experience that death. But we all "taste" the first death, so that cannot be the one that Jesus "tasted" for "all men" as our Substitute.

In fact, since the world began, only one Man has ever died that second death! Everybody else has merely gone to sleep.

But someone asks, "How could Christ die our second death and not endure the physical agony of the lake of fire? Doesn't Revelation say that "the lake of fire ... is the second death"?

If we read the passage carefully (20:12-15), we will see that the lost will suffer agony far greater than the Centigrade temperature of literal fire. It's when

the "books were opened" that the full stories of every man's involvement in the crucifixion and repeated re-crucifixions of Christ are laid open. Each lost person finally sees in awful detail the dimensions of his rebellion against the Lamb of God and against humanity; self-condemnation will be utterly overwhelming. It will be identical to the horror that Jesus felt when He cried out on His cross, "My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). That horror is lethal; it *is* the death of all deaths. Those lost people will want to jump into the lake of fire as soon as possible; a total end will be welcome. When Christ was "made to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Cor. 5:21), He drank to the full that bitter cup of condemnation—the kind that kills the soul (He didn't die of pain from the nails; He died of a broken heart).

Ephesians 1 is an outpouring of human gratitude for what He did for us! "Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to the adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will"

(Ephesians 1:4, 5). "Good pleasure of His will" "is a nice way of saying that this is what God has fun doing! He loves to save lost, hopeless, ruined human beings, young and old. If you would like to enjoy a fulfilled life, get busy being involved with Him in doing that same work.

"Predestined" is a word that means just what it says; let's not try to argue it away. It's simple, honest truth that God has long ago decided to save

every human being; He gave every one of us a page in His Book of Life.

He has invited everyone to a place of honor at His banquet table; the place mat with your name on it is there. His banquet is not a helter-skelter fast-food kind of picnic. It's a seven-course dinner in highest honor, with all the trappings extravagantly laid out. Your presence is seriously planned. "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires *all men* to be saved" (1 Tim. 2:3, 4).

But Jesus has had to tell the truth: many who have been invited whose names are engraved on the invitations choose not to accept (see Matt. 22:2-8). That's the only reason any human being will not be saved at last!

God has never "predestined" anyone to be lost. That would be a vicious distortion of the truth about a God of love. His divine foreknowledge must never be confused with an awful predestination to damnation.

We used to drive on one-track roads around steep precipices in the mountains. The law was that you must drive one way only during certain hours in order to avoid collisions. If I were on a mountaintop and saw someone breaking the law driving the wrong way at the wrong time, I would see a collision coming. Did I "predestinate" it simply because I couldn't help being in a position to foresee it? God can't help it that He has infinite foreknowledge; but if He wishes He can do something we can't do—lay that super-knowledge aside so He can love everybody with all His heart. (Jesus loved Judas Iscariot just as much as He loved the Eleven!)

"Adoption as sons" has to be automatic for everyone who chooses to believe in Jesus because He became our Brother in the flesh when He became one of the human family. Jesus never brings any of us home to His Father's house as a temporary guest; *we're all adopted*.

And it's useless to speculate, "Can the Father love His natural Son a wee bit more than He can love us adopted ones?" He gave His own Son to die our second death, all for the adopted ones. It was an exact equivalence; the only "difficult" thing in being saved eternally is learning to believe how good the good news is.

It may be a thought too big for you to begin to grasp, but you must choose to grasp it or you can never be happy: the Father "chose" you individually and personally to be "holy and without blame before Him." *That's your true predestination!* It will be true forever unless you interpose a contrary, negative, rebellious will against it.

"The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus, ... to the foot of the cross in repentance for his sins, which have caused the sufferings of God's dear Son."¹

"Holy-and-without-blame" leads us to the story of the 144,000 who finally before the end of time stand "without fault before the throne of God" (Rev. 14:5). Someone objects: "That's the heresy of perfectionism!" No, it's not. It's simply the natural result of a heart-appreciation for the *objective*

¹ *Steps to Christ*, p. 27.

gospel being demonstrated *subjectively* in the lives of those who believe it. The fact that it's never happened yet for 6000 years in a *corporate body* of people does not mean it never will happen. A fourth angel finally comes "down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth [is to be] lightened with his glory." He cries "mighty with a loud voice, 'Babylon the great is fallen.' ... And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, My people'" (Rev. 18:1-4).

The "mighty" part of the message is not physical decibels; it's the power of the finally clarified truth of "the everlasting gospel," "the third angel's message in verity." God's people will be ashamed that they didn't "hear" that "Voice from heaven" decades, now centuries, before. It had sounded, only to be greeted by deaf ears.

"To the praise and glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6).

Who is the "us"? Are we lonely people, standing on the side watching the baptism of Jesus at the Jordan River, hearing the Father declare of Him, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," feeling that He is not "well pleased" with us?

The truth is that what the Father said that of Jesus that day, He was also speaking of *us!* That word spoken of Jesus embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our Representative. With all our sins and weaknesses, we are not cast aside as worthless. "He has made us accepted in the Beloved"! Jesus has become the second Adam, the new Head of the

human race, and in Him we are accepted by the Father. The glory that rested on Christ is a pledge of the love of the Father for us. It tells us of the power of prayer,—how the human voice may reach the ear of God and our petitions find acceptance in the courts of heaven.

By sin, earth was cut off from heaven, and alienated from its communion; but Jesus has connected it again with the sphere of glory. His love has encircled man, and reached the highest heaven. The light which fell from the open portals upon the head of our Savior, will fall upon us as we pray for help to resist temptation. The voice which spoke to Jesus says to every believing soul, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."²

Note how Paul continues, reiterating this good news. The "we" and the "us" embrace the human race. It's already true before you heard the news; now it becomes *real* to you as you choose to believe it.

Do you like to think about the myriads of stars and the vast constellations scattered throughout the infinitude of space? Just look up at those stars tonight, imagine if you can their glory. Then think of this globe on which we live, the astounding complexity of its multitudinous forms of life, and the billions of human beings on it, each created in the image of the Creator of this vast universe.

No human mind can begin to comprehend this infinitude of creation. Isaac Watts caught a little of the heart-thrilling realization of two truths: Watts has

² *The Desire of Ages*, p. 113.

been considering “the thunders of His hand, . . . and all His mighty works,” the greatness of God’s creation, and His lowly condescension to us:

And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend,
And will He write His name:
My Father and my Friend?
[You have to pause here, and let your humbled heart marvel.]

I love His name, I love His word;
Join all my powers to praise the Lord!”

Yes, look up at those stars tonight, and then ponder—that mighty Sovereign of that vast universe is YOUR FATHER! Yes, and your FRIEND.

All because of His Son Jesus, who has fully adopted you into that “Family of God” (see Eph. 3:14, 15), at an infinite cost. He actually died for you, died your second death, suffered hell in your behalf. Think that one through; how can you possibly go on being selfish? You CAN’T—not if you believe the Good News (see 2 Cor. 5:14, 15).

If you can’t sleep tonight (or any night), pray The Lord’s Prayer:

(1) “My Father, which art in heaven . . .” No angel in heaven is permitted to address the great King of the universe, Master of the Milky Way, as “Father.” Every angel must stand aside and let you pass on your way to the throne of the Father. That is astounding, but solemnly true.

(2) It’s because of the Father’s love for this one “little lost sheep,” this one planet in rebellion; the Father has given His only Son, Jesus, to be the new Head of this human race; in so doing He has

adopted as members of His own family every one whose heart cries out, “Father!”

(3) In a legal, judicial sense, the Father has already adopted every one of the human family; but some either have refused to be adopted or have not known they have been adopted; these await the coming of the “news,” which of course is “good news,” which the Bible calls “the gospel.”

(4) “Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba, Father. The Spirit . . . beareth witness with our [personal] spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:15-17). When you can’t sleep, think about that.

(5) The Father has the Milky Way and all the universe around His neck (as it were), but He is infinite; that means He can care for you and about you just the same as if you were the only “child” He has in this vast universe.

(6) That is taught by Hebrews 11:6 where we are told that anyone who is sincere in wanting to come to God must believe two things: (a) that God IS—this infinite King of the universe; and (b) that He listens to, and rewards anyone who is sincere in coming to Him (including sinners!).

(7) So, when you can’t sleep, pray to this infinite Father who sees and cares when a little sparrow falls to the forest floor (Matt. 10:29). Pray to Him . . . don’t stop, pray . . . If you don’t know what to say, pray, “Abba, Father . . .” until the realization comes over through the Holy Spirit that you are somebody important whom “the Father of spirits” cares about personally (Heb. 12:9).

(8) This will be the “reconciliation” that the Father is working to do: “God was [is] in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor. 5:19).

(9) When you are reconciled to the Father, then you are also reconciled to His Holy Law. That will include all the works of righteousness including keeping holy the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, “the Lord’s [true] day” (cf. Rev. 1:10).

Jesus Christ is our “Brother” in human flesh—the divine One closest to us, “sticking closer” to us than even the best of our human brothers: “There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). Jesus is that Friend.

You must know how close He is. It’s a heavenly “family” that Ephesians says you have already been “adopted” into (1:3-7).

If your lonely heart cries out “Father!” Heaven looks upon you as already adopted into the Family (see Rom. 8:14-17). He respects your heart-choice. I can’t begin to describe what it means to be an “heir of God and joint-heir with Christ.” But that’s what you are by virtue of Christ’s sacrifice, the One who “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:13, 14). He did all this before we could say yes or no; it was already true before we were born, but He can’t force Himself on us: He did the giving of Himself, but He also gave us the freedom of choice—we can refuse the adoption. Don’t refuse it!

An “heir of God and joint-heir with Christ”? Those are holy words; we pause as we even write them.

Even the highest angels are not so honored or blessed!

The angels must stand back with their hands folded as you march past them on your way to the Great White Throne where high above it stands the cross of Christ where you were “adopted” (cf. Rev. 20:11, 12). The angels can’t come as close as you!

The love of God (*agape*) is what God says He is (1 John 4:8); it is high and holy, divine; it has to be “perfect” for “God is *agape*,” but John also says an almost unbelievable truth: that *agape* is “perfected in us”—in us who are weak and sinful (vs. 12). Ten thousand angels playing their harps and singing praise to God do not bring Him as much honor as does one lowly, hopeless, selfish sinner who opens his heart and permits that *agape* to transform him into the likeness of Christ in character. God is *agape* but the circuit is completed in you and me.

You will enter the New Jerusalem not as a convict barely forgiven but as someone highly honored, “in Christ”!

Say “yes!” to Him today.

The Savior has honored us by giving us permission to call His Father “Our Father.” If you cry out in your distress to the “Father,” not only does He hear you, but He also adopts you as His child! This is proven true here, “You have received the spirit of adoption, by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom. 8:15). Now you are walking with Him, and you are letting Him hold your right hand (Isa. 41:10, 13).

Now your heavenly Father is far stronger than your earthly parents were; all they could do was pass on

to you the “judicial condemnation” that our first father Adam gave us; now your heavenly Father through Christ is pronouncing over you a “judicial verdict of acquittal” in Christ, and that has “much more power” than what Adam gave you (Rom. 5:17, 18).

The grace of Christ is “much more abounding” than all the sinful habits and addictions that Satan can invent (5:20). He has given all this to you already; now thank Him for it.

As you go about your work this week, you can you sing for joy? Or are you worried about your standing with God, fearful of the judgment, perplexed as to what God thinks about you?

If you trust your feelings, your emotions, you will be up and down, you can be discouraged. Your emotions are like a foundation of sinking sand. You need a foundation of solid rock. That foundation is the cross of Christ.

God did not say, “I will so love the world that I will give my only begotten Son IF, IF, IF . . . they do everything just right. The Bible does say, “For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son . . .” He already loved, He already gave His Son for you, for the world is you. (That is John 3:16, by the way). You are the one God loved and gave Christ to save. He has already redeemed you; He has already adopted you into His family. The Holy Spirit has already been given to you to convict you of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, because Satan has been defeated.

Yes, your heart can sing for joy! You have been elected to eternal life, and God is your Friend, your

heavenly Father, your Savior. But does that mean that you and I can now live a life of disobedience to God’s law? No, of course not; but it does mean that this faith will work by love and will produce in our lives total obedience to God’s law. The Holy Spirit will convict you, will prompt you, will guide you today. Listen to Him, and let Him hold you by the hand.