

HEAVEN'S ADOPTION AGENCY¹

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Any number of couples have gone through long processes in order to adopt children. At times it has seemed that adoption agencies stood in the way of progress. Government “red tape” has also been a roadblock. But what is so impressive is the love which parents have for children. And fortunately, in many cases that love prevails. Children are welcomed into new homes where they are nurtured and cared for.

In Ephesians Paul 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 notice 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.

¹ Ephesians 1:4-6. Redeemed, I’m a Child of the King

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” (Eph. 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. The law is 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!)

The Father has adopted the human race “in Christ,” and made the human race to be “accepted in the beloved” (Eph. 1:4-6).² Included in the “gift” of His grace is the freedom to believe or disbelieve. A child may be legally adopted yet grow up to repudiate the adoption.³

How can you know you are eternally saved? (Or *Can You Know?*) Some thoughtful person wrote: “You only can make real progress in your spiritual life when you get past the concern about your own personal salvation, and can start thinking about other people’s. While you are struggling with the issue of whether or not you are going to make it, all your emotional energy is absorbed; you are held in

² Ellen White applies this phrase in verse 6 not only to individual believers but in a legal sense to the entire human race: “The word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative . . . ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved’ (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 113).

³ This of course does not mean that all will be saved eternally.

bondage. A large part of our church family is in this situation, and consequently we are not making any significant impact in the developed world. Assurance of salvation is the dynamic that brings vitality and freedom to our own lives and empowers mission outreach. It allows us to speak with a certainty and conviction that impacts on others.”

Well said! But how can we attain this certainty, or assurance? Is there danger of trusting a false security that will end up in tragedy? In order to keep us humble, does God want us in a kind of limbo?

We cannot evade inspired warnings about a false assurance. Jesus said: “When the Judgment Day comes, many will say to Me, ‘Lord, Lord! In Your name we spoke God’s message, by Your name we drove out many demons and performed many miracles!’ Then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you.’” (Mt. 7:21, 22, GNB). Nothing could be worse than that! Luke tells it more vividly:

“Jesus answered them, ‘Do your best to go in through the narrow door because many people will surely try to go in but will not be able . . . When you stand outside and begin to knock on the door and say, ‘Open the door for us, sir!’ He will answer you, ‘I don’t know where you come from!’ Then you will answer, ‘We ate and drank with You; You taught in our town!’ But He will say again, ‘I don’t know where you come from . . . How you will cry and gnash your teeth . . .’” (13:24-28, GNB).

There is a mysterious mix-up in the feelings of both classes in that last great Judgment Day. Each side thinks Jesus has mistakenly put them in the wrong place. When “the King will say to the people

on His right, 'Come, you that are blessed by My Father!'" they protest that there must be some mistake. You don't mean *us*, do You "When, Lord, did we ever see *You* hungry and feed *You*, or thirsty, and give *You* a drink . . .?"

They will be pleasantly surprised! But the other group are equally surprised. We don't deserve this! "The King will reply, 'I tell you, whenever you refused to help one of these least important ones, you refused to help Me.' These, then, will be sent off to eternal punishment" (Mt. 25:34-46, GNB).

Horror of horrors! How can we stress too much the danger of cherishing a false assurance?

But does God want us constantly worried? "Fear not, little flock," Jesus says; "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." But again when we look at the context of His assurance, we find He talks about a condition: selling "what you have to give to the poor," obviously a built-in warning (Luke 12:32, 33).

Even His assurance to the one who "overcomes" that "the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life" comes with a built-in warning: the one who does not "overcome" will find his name *is* removed (Rev. 3:5).

No matter where we look in the Bible, assurance of salvation is balanced with similar warnings about losing out. We can't run away from reality. Perhaps in the middle of some night we wonder, How do I *know* that I will "overcome"? How do I *know* that I can meet the test of the mark of the beast? How in the time of trouble can I live "in the sight of a holy

God without an Intercessor"? (Some cheerfully answer, "We will die before that time! We prefer to go to heaven by the underground route; the subway gets you get there just the same without all that hassle of the time of trouble." Someone needs to tell them, "Shame on you! You are depriving Jesus of the witness He needs in the final struggle of the last days! You are thoroughly egocentric!").

God doesn't want us fearful and worried; it's bad for our health. Neither does He want us proud and arrogant. The ideal: a concern for the honor of God that transcends our fear for our own security, and then learning to think of others.

But how can we attain this ideal? Some solid principles:

The only person who has ever been promised such assurance is Jesus Himself. Paul gives us this surprising insight: "To Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many [plural], but as of one [singular], 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16). There is only one "elect" person: "Behold! My Servant [singular] whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!" (Isa. 42:1). Anybody else who inherits eternal life will do so only "in Him." (Incidentally, even Abraham gets a blessing only through His "Seed, which is Christ").

The Father has adopted the human race "in Christ." When John baptized Jesus and He heard that Voice from heaven say, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," the Father was speaking to you me at the same time. He has "predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ

to Himself” (Eph. 1:5). “The word that was spoken to Jesus at the Jordan, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,’ embraces humanity. God spoke to Jesus as our representative. . . . ‘He hath made us accepted in the Beloved’ [Eph. 1:6]” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 113). The word “us” that appears some twelve times in Ephesians 1 therefore means the entire human race! “We” are “blessed with all spiritual blessings,’ ‘chosen in Him,” “predestined to adoption” in Him, “we have redemption through [in] His blood, the forgiveness of sins,” “in Him . . . we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to [His] purpose.”

Since Christ is the “second Adam,” the new Head of the human race, you don’t have to *do* anything in order to be “accepted in the Beloved.” If you were born on planet earth, the promise applies to you; but as a member of “humanity” you do have to *believe* this Good News in order to *realize* the blessing!⁴

This raises the question, “What Christ accomplished by His sacrifice?” When the Father sent Him to this earth, He gave Him a clear-cut job description: *go down there and save that lost world!* Says Jesus, “I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.” “I . . . came down from heaven . . . [to] give . . . My flesh . . . for the life of the world.” Then in His prayer before His death He made the solemn claim: “Father, . . . I have finished the work which You have given Me to do” (John 12:47; 6:51;

⁴ Believing the Father’s promise of acceptance will motivate the believer to do all manner of good works, “constrained” by the love of Christ

17:4). Thus Jesus’ true title is, “the Savior of the world,” “the Savior of all men” (John 4:42; 1 Tim. 4:10). Magnificent achievement!

Now, if Christ *accomplished* what He was sent to do, then it follows logically that He has chosen everyone to be saved. “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3, 4). Pray His prayer He taught us, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10, KJV)!

Paul’s ideas explode in people’s hearts like sticks of spiritual dynamite. One example is his illustration of a little barefoot boy who runs around the great estate of a wealthy rancher who has slaves (Gal. 4:1-7). The slaves boss the little boy around and tell him when to go home, etc. And he obeys them. But the amazing thing is that this kid is the son of the great owner himself!

Now, says Paul, when that little kid grows up, he becomes the owner and then *he* bosses the slaves around! So, says Paul, you and I have been subject to the tyranny of the “elements of the world,” evil spirits, until we hear and receive the Good News that God sent forth His Son made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem us.

What’s the point? God does not regard unconverted people as wolves to be shot down as soon as possible; no, but He regards them as sheep, not in the fold, to be sure, but still sheep—lost sheep. They need to be converted, to be born again, yes; but all the while God considers them to be heirs to His estate because He sent forth His

Son to be “made of a woman” as we are all “made of a woman.” He has adopted the human race “in Christ.”

You are not to think of yourself as an outsider, says Paul. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, you are now “in the family,” adopted (Eph. 1:5), loved all the while as the prodigal son was loved. But you didn’t know it; you felt ostracized, estranged, alienated, lost, rejected; but God did not regard you as estranged or alienated. He reconciled you to Himself “in Christ.” Now, says Paul, “be ye reconciled to God.” The proof that He has reconciled you? Gal. 3:6, “God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your heart, crying, Abba, Father.” What a beautiful, yes and powerful, illustration of Good News “in Christ,” and now you can see it for yourself, because your human heart is crying “Father. . . !”

The Bible view tells the prodigal son, “You are a child of God ‘in Christ’ by virtue of His sacrifice as the second Adam, and He has elected you since He gave Himself for you on His cross. But you have wandered away and sold your birthright. Now, realize and appreciate your true status in Him. Let His love draw you home where you belong, by virtue of His already adopting you ‘in Christ.’ Repent.” The legal justification that you ask about *is* His “adoption” of the entire human race “in Christ.”

“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.”⁵

Do you know how to tell if you are indeed a child of God and not a child of what John says is “the wicked one” (1 John 2:13, 14)? The right answer will spell either great happiness or despair.

Well, Paul gives us a simple litmus test whereby we can tell. It’s in Romans 8:15, 16: “You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” That word “abba” is the Hebrew for “father,” the simplest syllable a

⁵ *Steps to Christ*, p. 27.

baby of any language utters, “ba-ba.” You may never have uttered a formal prayer, but if in the depths of your heart your soul cries out in your distress or agony, “Father, Father . . . please help me!” then you have the witness of the Holy Spirit that you are a child of God.

But you say, “How can that be? I’m a sinner! I have guilt!” Well, don’t forget that the scribes and Pharisees accused Christ, “This man receiveth sinners!” (Luke 15:2). In fact, sinners are the only people that Jesus does “receive.” You may not yet be a perfect “child of God,” but if your heart cries out “Father!” then this Heavenly Father simply cannot turn away from such a cry. “What man [father] is there among you who if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? . . . If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father give good things to them who ask Him!” (Matt. 7:9, 10). Did your father starve you if you didn’t behave?

You may object, “Yes, my earthly father was a meanie and I hate the word!” Never mind; dig a little deeper and you will discover that when you were a baby, a child, your heart yearned for “abba, Father!” even if you did not realize the pleasure of fulfillment then. And your heart is still the same today. That’s your deepest longing. Your heart is bursting to let those words come out. Let them come! Say them! Believe the Good News even if you don’t feel like it. Choose to believe! There is the difference between happiness and despair. You will “overcome the wicked one.”

Your heart cries out to God as “Abba, Father” (Rom. 8:15, 16), which proves that He has “adopted” you, stumbling and staggering and unworthy as you may feel yourself to be; you’re in the “family,” and the Savior has promised and sworn that He will “in no wise cast [you] out” (John 6:37).