

Ephesians 1:3-14**Adopted in Christ**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I was growing up, one of the common insults between siblings who were fighting was, "you're adopted". The intention was to claim that you're not really part of the family, you're not the same as us proper kids. It's a bit of a silly insult, especially when you consider that the adoption process can be quite arduous, and parents have to really want it to go through the whole thing. The parents chose to make the child their own. They didn't have to, but out of love, they did.

This is the sense in which we read the passage today from Ephesians. Speaking of God the Father, it says, "In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." In love, we are adopted by the heavenly Father through Jesus. God didn't have to, but out of love, he did.

But to fully understand Paul's point here we need to understand what adoption looked like at the time this epistle was written. Adoption was reasonably common in the ancient world, especially among the rich and powerful. The main purpose was to designate your heir apparent. Your estate would automatically go to your eldest son, and if you wanted to give it to someone else, you basically adopted them as your eldest son. The adopted person, who could even be an adult at the time, gained the social status of their new parents. Sometimes it could even be the household servant who received this adoption, which means they quickly had to learn the ways of the upper ranks of society.

So, adoption was your path to immense power and status. And in return, the adopted child honoured the parent through taking the parent's name and being loyal to them. This happened quite regularly within the Roman imperial family. You might recognise some of these names from history lessons at school. Augustus had been adopted by his uncle Julius to succeed him as emperor. In turn, Augustus then adopted his wife's son, Tiberius who succeeded him as emperor. Tiberius subsequently adopted Germanicus, and it was then Caligula, the son of Germanicus who succeeded Tiberius as Emperor. And also, the infamous Nero was adopted by his stepfather Claudius, which put him in line to reign over the empire. All of that is in the background of what Paul writes. The adoption he mentions is very much associated with inheritance, with status, with wealth, and with power.

So, we can read this text to mean that we, by the grace of God, have been adopted into a glorious new family with a previously unimaginable high status, to share the responsibility of wielding God's glorious power of God's in the world. This is part of the extraordinary and wonderful affirmation that the Father has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing." Being adopted into the family of God is a great spiritual blessing. And all of this happens "in Christ". Nearly every verse of this passage focuses on Christ. God chose us in Christ. God adopted us through Christ. Grace is bestowed in the beloved Son. Our redemption is found in the blood of Christ. God will and purpose is made known through Christ. And all things will find their fulfilment in Christ.

God's self-revelation and acts of mercy and salvation are clearly seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus becomes the focal point of all time and all existence. It says God will "bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ." "All things" should be understood with the widest possible meaning, including not only we humans but all of creation. There is nothing that can stand in the way of God reconciling all things in Christ. A few verses later in the chapter we read that God has made Christ the head of all things so that Christ fills all things. There is nothing that can escape or resist God's reconciling plan, and that includes any forces or powers that might trouble us in our lives. And through adoption, we are joined into all of this.

Verse 7 highlights two initial gifts that are bestowed upon the adopted. First, redemption and second, forgiveness. Through adoption into Christ, we have been redeemed from our previous lives. Through adoption into Christ, we receive the benefits of his sacrificial death on a cross. And the way Paul makes this clear is the phrase 'adoption to sonship'. Some translations make this the gender-neutral phrase 'adopted as God's children', but unfortunately that obscures the point. In the ancient world, the heir receives the whole estate. You have one son who succeeds you and carries on the family name. But in God's family, we are all adopted into Christ, meaning into his position as the only begotten Son of the Father. In the epistle to the Romans, St Paul says we are heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. The blessings given to the eternal Son by the Father are not limited like an earthly estate is limited. The eternal blessings encompass all things, and so they can be shared infinitely with all the children of God.

Covered with the blood of Christ, we all stand before the Father with the same status as Jesus the Son. This is why we can say that God has "blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ." Because we are in Christ, because we are adopted into his position of God's Son, we share in his every blessing. And to add to that, we have been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, assured of our place in the household of God. This gives us a great confidence in God.

In God's great love he has chosen us to be his own. He has adopted us in Christ and through Christ and into the position of Christ the beloved Son. And there's no need for sibling rivalry as we all hold the same position. And it's not because of anything we have done, but simply out of God's divine grace and mercy. And so the only appropriate response to all of this is to praise God. And that's exactly what St Paul calls us to. He began:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

And the section we read today ends with the promise of the Holy Spirit, the guarantee of our inheritance, and says all of this is "to the praise of his glory."

As God's children, adopted into and through Christ, our life should be one of praise through our words and through our actions. We are placed into a special position, and through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we are to live up to the fullness of our new status as heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. So may we indeed praise God for choosing us to be his own. And may we honour God's purpose for our lives, showing faithfulness in response to his immeasurable grace. And may we be eternally thankful that God's love is so great that he gives us the great blessing of adoption in Christ Jesus, who is our Saviour and Redeemer. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.