

**A Series on Ephesians: Spiritual Blessings
He Adopted Us (Ephesians 1:1-14)
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I. Spiritual Blessings

Happy Martin Luther King Jr. Weekend!

We are in the middle of a series on Ephesians, and series within a series called Spiritual Blessings.

When things are difficult, and we are struggling with finding a job, finances, housing, relational issues, we wonder if God is blessing us at all. Why isn't God blessing me? Paul wrote this letter from prison. He had nothing materially. He was in chains. He was poor. He didn't eat well. He was in rags. Yet, when he wrote this letter, in Ephesians 1:3, Paul starts out the letter by saying: **"Praise be to God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."** Then, he breaks out into all of the spiritual blessings that God has bestowed upon us, all the way until the end of verse 14. Verses 3-14 is grammatically one sentence.

He was praising God for the true blessings we have received, the blessings that transcend other blessings. If we had all the riches of the world, but didn't have this blessing, it would mean nothing. Paul, in another occasion said, compared to the riches of God in the heavenly realms, our material blessings are nothing.

So, during this short sub-series, we are going to look at the true blessings we have in Christ so that our lives can be like Paul—praising God even in midst of suffering.

Let's read Ephesians 1:1-3-14

³ 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. [what did he bless us with?] ⁴ For ["for" means this is what he has blessed with] he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. [we talked about this blessing last week] In love ⁵ he^a predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

^a 4,5 Or *sight in love. He*

We are going to look at (1) what it means that we are adopted as his sons, as his children; (2) how to live our lives as sons and daughters; and (3) a result of living our lives as his children.

When we talk about fathers, many of us have mixed feelings because many of us have fathers who failed us. So many of our fathers were absentees. Some of our fathers abused us. But even so, we yearn for the perfect father.

Through Christ, the Creator can be your father. Every other religion says you can be his servant, student, follower, but Christianity says you can be adopted as his child.

II. Let's look at what it means that we are adopted as his children.

A. Adoption is the highest blessing God can bestow upon us.

In the Roman world, adoption was the highest thing a wealthy person can do to a person. Unlike today, this was done usually of an adult. A typical situation was like this: Man who was a head of an estate has no heir. He sees a young man who he respects and admires and decides to adopt him as his son. When the man adopts, three things happen: (1) All of the old debts are cancelled. He doesn't owe anyone anything because the father pays them off; (2) He becomes as wealthy as the father because he will inherit the estate; and (3) The son has the responsibility of carrying on and honoring the father's name. It was a legal change. It was the highest thing possible. There are many things God blesses you with, but nothing can be higher than this. Jesus died on the cross for our forgiveness—to declare us innocent of our sins. But, adoption as his children is higher than that. It is one thing for the governor to pardon a criminal but another thing for the governor to adopt this criminal as his son. The highest thing that God can do for anyone is to adopt us.

B. Our adoption is like and unlike Christ's sonship.

On the one hand, our sonship is like it. The whole purpose of adoption is to treat the person as your own. People try to do it as well as they can. But God does it perfectly. So, God loves us as much as he loves his only begotten son. When Jesus says

in John 17:23—“you have loved them even as you loved me.” This must mean that he loves us as much as he loves his son, Jesus. Imagine his love for his son!!! Imagine the fellowship they had even before the creation of the universe. Imagine the pain of separation when he was on the cross. Imagine the joy of being together again. Imagine the love God has for his Son. God loves you no less. Do you believe that? What would happen if you actually believe that?

On the other hand, Jesus’ sonship is different. We are adopted but it doesn’t mean we actually become God. It is not merging into God. The son submits to the father. A lot of new age books say: create your own reality. You shall be as God. That’s what Satan says. We are called to come in and become sons and daughters who reflect him but we don’t get merged into him.

[By-the-way: A lot of people don’t like the fact that Paul uses the word son for both male and female. Actually, Paul was being very subversive. Sonship meant power and authority, and when Paul uses that word and puts it on all Christians, both male and female. When he calls us his sons, females should not be offended as men should be offended when we are called the bride of Jesus. Let’s not get bent out of shape because of metaphor.]

III. How do we live as children of God?

A. We live not as slaves but as children

Romans 8:15-17 says:

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

If you have fears, anxieties, depressions, frustration, hatred—in fact you feel like you are trapped in them—that you are a slave to them, allow the spirit to testify to you that you are God’s child.

Galatians 4:6-7

6 Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir.

In this passage, Paul compares being a son to being a slave. And if you look at the passage carefully, he is talking about being a slave to the law and being a son through Christ.

Being a slave to the law means you are working out of fear—fear of punishment, fear of embarrassment, fear of getting kicked out, fear of not being accepted.

Being a son means your security is secure. You are accepted not because of anything you have done but because of the grace of the Father who adopted you. You are not going to get kicked out. Your inheritance is secure. So, the son is working out of love.

Are you a slave or a son?

Slaves to the law are up and down emotionally. When they perform well, they feel worthwhile. The son knows that his performance is not why he is in the house. He is in the house because God has adopted him.

Which are you?

Slaves to the law are critical and gossipy. They need to believe that they are better than others. If you are critical, you have a slave’s mentality.

The spirit’s job is to tell you that you are a child. If you are going on performance orientation, you are sliding to slavery.

Live as a child of God.

B. We have access to the Father: We can take everything to God.

The Bible tells us that we have a spirit of sonship that lead us to cry *abba* father. This is an Aramaic word that is hard to translate. It literally means daddy, but it is not a juvenile word. It is the most intimate word of affection for a father. Intimacy with the Infinite! It would be ridiculous to ask the President to get us a cup of water, but if he is

your daddy, you can ask him to give you water in the middle of the night. If you get this, you will be praying shamelessly. You should pray as children would. Five year olds don't stop because they don't want to impose upon us. He is not going to say: he is not going to answer this because it is too small for him. Do you have the slave mentality or son mentality?

Do you cry abba father? There was a missionary who adopted a 10 year old girl. She was legally adopted, but didn't call him daddy. One day, she was hurt in the yard, and she called out, daddy! Do you pray like you are a child of God?

C. To live as children of God is to live with a sense of being wealthy.

Romans 8:19 says: **19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.**

It says all of the nature is frustrated, decaying, and groaning (and we heard the painful groaning in Haiti) but nature and we await for the adoption of us as sons? How can Paul say that since we are already adopted? One thing you can't give to an adopted child is your DNA. But, one day, God is going to give us the full family likeness, the full DNA. Paul talks about this in amazing terms. We were built to take care of nature. When we fell into sin, we took nature with us, and when we come to glory, somehow, we are going to take the nature with us. The suffering in the present time, it is nothing compared to the glory that is going to come down. New Heavens and New Earth and we are going to be in charge, and everything is so beautiful. My hope for that saves me. My hope of the future saves me. That's how I deal with my suffering. Unless you know you are wealthy, you can't live in stability. Some people know that someday, they are going to come into a fortune. They don't have the same worries because they know they are going to come into a fortune. Unless you got this hope, you will not be able to handle the

problems of life. Wait until you see what really is yours. Infant kings have no idea about the glory that is waiting for them. We are like that. Someone took my rattle! So what! It is nothing compared to my inheritance. That's how a son of the King talks.

C. If we live as His children, we will approach our suffering as disciplines.

Hebrew 12:7-11 says:

“7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

The minutes you realize you are a child of God, you have a different view to suffering. You will never say: I am being punished. My father is trying to help me become better.

Some people say: I can't trust God because I don't understand why this is happening. Children are constantly being told by parents that you can't understand. They don't understand. What if in the middle of our suffering we learn to say, Father you don't have to explain everything for me to trust you. Because after all, I am a child.

Our fears, our inferiority complex, our self-hate, our callousness, our selfishness, our sinfulness, etc. They are all caused by our failure to believe in our sonship.

IV. Conclusion: The understand and practice of sonship is the key to transformation—getting rid of these selfishness, fears, inferiority complex, sinfulness.

The Bible says that our identity, our *position*, is that of sons and daughters of God, but our lives, the way we are and live, our *condition*, is far from being like a son or daughter of God. Our condition is still messed up. So, how do we change our condition? It starts from a deep understanding of our position.

Let me illustrate.

Billy is a 13 year old pick-pocket. This is how he has survived. He doesn't know who his parents are. He grew up on the streets and he did whatever it took to survive. The king's men were searching the entire kingdom for the king's lost son. This king had everything but he did not have his son. This grieved him deeply. He was a man of broken heart. The king's men searched for many years. And finally, they found Billy. They carefully examined his birthmarks and determined that Billy was the lost prince of the king. So, they brought him to the palace and cleaned him up and gave him the finest clothes and put rings on his fingers. He met his father, the King, and the overjoyed father told Billy that everything he had was Billy's. But Billy went around the palace pick-pocketing.

What is wrong with this picture? Why is Billy like this? I believe there are two reasons: he doesn't know his father and he does not know who he is. Billy does not fully understand his position. He does not realize that he is really a prince. He does not know the rights and privileges of a prince. What would make Billy stop?

The only way is through a continuous and intimate relationship with his father. Ultimately, the key to changing his condition as a pick-pocket is to fully understand his position and come to know and trust his father. This is why the Bible tells us that the Holy Spirit testifies to us that we are the sons and daughters of the God of Universe.

The more intimate your relationship with God becomes, the more you will realize, know, and trust God and understand your position in your heart and in your mind, and the more the Holy Spirit will change your condition. The Holy Spirit will change your life. He will empower you to live with power.

Sometimes, we are hung up on believing who God says I am, sometime, we are hung up on not believing who God is. We don't see him as the gracious father that he is. We see him like our early father who disappointed us, who you couldn't live up, who was angry at us.

I heard one woman tell a story of about how one day, she saw her older sister hanging up her father's white business shirt on the clothesline. Even though she was too young, you decided she wanted express her love for her dad by hanging up one of his clothes. But, she couldn't reach the clothesline; so, she hung the cloth on a wheelbarrow nearby. Her dad got home and saw the ruined shirt on the wheelbarrow and severely punished her. She said that in many ways, she didn't think that God was different than her father. She just couldn't believe that God was pleased with her.

Her life was a continued effort earn God's pleasure by "getting the shirts hung up right." She thought God would answer her prayer if she prayed just right. She thought God would smile upon her if her theology was correct. She said her entire Christian life was oppressive. She said, "I did not know how to live day by day without an overwhelming sense of failure to perform up to what I thought God demanded. With that came a sense of God being disappointed and even disgusted with me."

When she came to terms of the realization that the Father was not like her father, that God would have put on the shirt and wore it to work and share with his colleagues about how much his daughter loves him.

Ephesians 1:4 tells us that he adopted us as sons through Christ Jesus according to his pleasure. It gave him pleasure to adopt us. Let us live in the pleasure of God's family.