

UNDERSTANDING UNION WITH CHRIST - Why It Isn't Just Religious Pretending - Part four

Teaching #1929 - Sunday, November 27th, 2016 - 6:00 p.m.

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SONS AND DAUGHTERS OF GOD - LIVING LIFE OUT OF THE REALITY OF OUR ADOPTION IN GOD THE SON

Reni and I were watching Oprah interview a very prominent Hillsong pastor several weeks ago on a Sunday night after church. It was all pleasant enough. Sooner or later though, the inevitable "Oprah" question was asked: ***"Is it only Christians who can know God like this?"***

Suddenly the pastor was under pressure. He did the inclusive dance and tried to scramble around the issue as best he could. ***"Intolerant"*** is an ugly label the pastor of Justin Bieber can't afford to wear.

"No," he said, "God is into the whole world." Not totally sure what that meant but the vague answer seemed to do the trick. He won the approving smile of the cosmic, soul-embracing Oprah. The exam was over and he passed.

Then Oprah specifically said her favorite verse in the Bible was, ***"In God we live and move and have our being."*** This, of course, is one of the very few verses in the Bible that doesn't have any Scriptural roots or authority at all. Paul, in **Acts 17:28**, is merely telling these idolaters in Athens what one of their own **pagan** poets had written.

But the verse **does** work well for Oprah - and anyone else desiring to believe we are all, regardless of religious convictions or atheistic convictions or pantheistic convictions or polytheistic convictions - we are all, if we only knew it, caught up in the same inclusive loving embrace of the creator God. All those pursuing their own moral goodness, those true to their inner selves, and those reaching out to others in love, are, according to this pastor and Oprah, God's children.

And there was that ever-so-popular phrase again - ***"God's children"*** - ***"Children of God."*** With the exception of a few angry atheists it's the most popular name tag in the whole world. You'll never make an enemy pushing that concept. We're all the same. No intolerance here. We're **all** God's children. Then wrap it all up with everyone joining hands for just a few strains of ***"What the World Needs Now is Love Sweet Love,"*** or John Lennon's ***"Imagine."***

The question for us now is simple. ***Is this New Testament Christianity?*** Are children of God formed from **creation?** By that I mean are we **children** of God just because we are **created** by God? Are we children of God just as a result of being **born** into this world? Are we children of God in the same way we are **human beings?** So being **human equals** being **children of God** - like TomAto/Tomato. Or are **nice** people God's children and **bad** people not so much? And if **that's** the case, who gets to decide who's in and who's out? How good to qualify and how bad to be disowned?

Fortunately for all of us this is a subject on which the New Testament speaks in abundance. And perhaps nowhere is the central doctrine of **union with Christ** more impacting and distinctive than right at this point.

1) **BEING CHILDREN OF GOD ISN'T A PRODUCT OF ORIGINAL CREATION AND ISN'T A GIFT GIVEN EXTERNALLY FROM GOD THE SON**

Just as God doesn't give out *forgiveness* like a divine Christmas present, so *adoption as children* is found only in *union with Christ*. In other words, *adoption as children of God* isn't a *separate blessing* God creates *outside* of our being *in Christ Jesus*.

John 1:12-13 - "But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, [13] who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

Quickly note the way John is careful to distinguish between our *physical birth* - "...born....of blood....the will of the flesh....the will of man...." - he distinguishes this from our *adoption as children of God* - "...he gave the right to become children of God." Spiritual adoption as God's children is *not* a product of original creation. It isn't what we originally *are*. It is what we must *become*. We are all God's *creatures* by creation, to be sure. But we are not by creation His *children*. Again, *creatures* of God are what we are *made*. *Children* of God are what we are urged to *become*.

Galatians 3:26 - "....for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

This text makes clear we are "*sons of God*" (and daughters) only as we are "*in Christ Jesus*." Just as forgiveness and redemption and justification aren't offered *externally* from God the Son, so our *adoption as God's children* doesn't exist apart from being "*in Christ Jesus*." Our status as adopted children comes from being united with God's one and only *natural Son*. His *natural* Son-ship is the source of our *adopted* son-ship.

Ephesians 1:5-6 - "....he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

Note those wonderful closing words. "*Adoption as sons* (and daughters)" is a blessing we receive when we are "*in the beloved*." And the beloved is God's one and only *natural Son*, God the Son, Jesus Christ.

This leads to the next important point:

2) **HUMANITY'S NATURAL FALLEN CONDITION ISN'T ONE OF ADOPTION INTO GOD'S FAMILY BUT ALIENATION FROM GOD**

Ephesians 2:1-2 - "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins [2] in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience...."

Galatians 4:4-7 - "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, [5] to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. [6] And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba! Father! [7] So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God."

These texts are the way the Bible describes our *natural* standing before God as *creatures outside of Christ*. Paul describes mankind in its fallen created condition as *“sons of disobedience”* - literally the *“offspring of disobedience.”* These are our natural fallen family roots. This is not only *different*. It is the *opposite* of being *children*, or *“offspring”* of God.

In other places Paul describes mankind's natural created condition as one of being *enemies* of God - **Romans 5:10** - **“For if *while we were enemies* we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”**

This is one of those wonderful texts where Paul reminds us we are no longer *enemies* of God. And then, while never actually using the term *adoption*, he presses home the fact that we are *“reconciled”* to God and are therefore no longer *“enemies.”* This is the change of *relationship* that comes by being in God the Son. Then Paul adds we *“shall be saved by his (the Son's) life.”*

Please underscore the whole foundation for the removal of our natural *enmity* toward God. Paul *doesn't* just attribute this change of status to the Son's *death*. This is where we usually locate the root of our salvation. But Paul is pressing deeper here. We don't just receive *forgiveness* through Christ. **Our union with the Son through the incarnation means His ongoing life as the beloved Son of God carries us into that same Father-Son love of the trinity.** We *participate* in Trinitarian love because we are *in* the Son of the Father's love (Eph.1:6).

Don't rush through this. Our union with Christ - being *in Christ* - is the means by which I share in the *natural Son's* relationship with God, not in my fallen condition as *creature to Creator* but as *adopted son to Father*. And Paul reminds me I am still being sustained in that loving relationship by my union with the *man, Christ Jesus. I am still being saved in that love by Christ's ongoing Incarnational life before the Father.*

3) **THE MOST PRECIOUS FRUIT FROM MY ONENESS WITH GOD THE SON ISN'T JUST FORGIVENESS. IT'S THE BESTOWAL OF THE SAME LOVE THE FATHER HAS FOR THE SON**

This is holy ground. We wouldn't dare repeat something this grand if the New Testament didn't insist on it. The promises are staggering:

John 17:20-24 - **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, *just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us,* so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] *I in them and you in me,* that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know *that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.* [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”**

There is so much here. But just take the words of the last half of **verse 23** - **“...that the world may know that you sent me and loved them *even as you loved me.*”** Jesus speaks to the Father restating that ***He (God the Son) was sent.*** This is that ***Incarnational sending*** where the One John calls God's ***“only”*** Son (the Father's only *natural* Son) fully and permanently linked to Himself the total broken

humanity of Don Horban.

But Jesus' prayer doesn't end with that point. He proceeds to say there are very real results growing out of the Father's sending of the Son in the flesh of Don Horban. And one of those results is unbelievable. Jesus dares to say to the Father that the same Fatherly love extended to God the Son is also extended ***on the same measure*** to Don Horban who is eternally one with the ***man Christ Jesus*** at the right hand of the Father right now.

This is the reality of ***adoption in God the Son***. We are brought into the ***same*** love with ***God the Father***. But it didn't happen in the creation account in the garden in Genesis one. And it doesn't happen by giving your money to the poor. And it doesn't happen by trying to find the divinity within your own heart.

Let it be said loud and clear. Adoption as children of God happens in the one and only place it can possibly happen in all of God's creation. It happens only in the Incarnate Son of God or it doesn't happen at all. There is no other possible point of connection with God. Don't look into the murkiness of your inner feelings. Look to Jesus, God the Son. Look in faith to the one point in all the universe where God unites us to Himself. We celebrate it every Christmas.

4) **OUR ADOPTION IN GOD THE SON IS BOTH A PRESENT REALITY AND A FUTURE HOPE**

Romans 8:15-17 - "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but ***you have received the Spirit of adoption*** as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" [16] The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that ***we are children of God***, [17] and ***if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ***, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Romans 8:22-25 - "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. [23] And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly ***as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons***, the redemption of our bodies. [24] For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? [25] But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

These are profound verses. Our adoption as children of God through the ***God/Man, the Incarnate God the Son***, is now a present reality. It is as real and as permanent as the physical flesh of the Incarnation is real and permanent.

Then Paul says we are called to ***live out of our present adoption into the full manifestation of it when the Man, Jesus Christ, comes again***. Paul goes so far as to say this ***hope of future adoption*** has ***saving power*** in our present circumstances - **Romans 8:24a** - "For in this hope we were saved...."

We are called to ***live into*** our new family identity. We know how this works on the human level of adoption. How sad it is when a child is adopted - perhaps at a slightly older age - and then continues to live out of the brokenness of perhaps a very tragic past. What the adopting parents long for is more than just a change of name. They lovingly long for that child to increasingly ***live out of*** his or her new family identity. It goes deeper than merely a change of ***legal status***. It's a totally new ***identity***.

Never forget, this is Father God's plan for all His adopted children. It's more than having **"your name written in heaven."** It's a brand new identity shaping present life here on earth while we wait with hearts filled with hope. And in **that** conscious hope we are **"being saved!"**

Christ in you. The hope of glory.