

Parson to Person

ROMANS 8 PART 3

“For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but 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, and if children, then heirs— heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. ²⁴ For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance. Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:15–27 NKJV).

Our understanding of adoption in America is comparably different from adoption in the Roman and Jewish cultures.

To begin with, for those in the U.S., adoption is the assumption of legal parental responsibility assigned to a husband and wife (or individual) for a child not biologically born to that couple or person. (We won’t get into the same sex union issues for this discussion.) We in the U.S. would not consider the need for or seek the privileges of adoption for a child born to us by biological parenthood. However, in the Roman community, adoption is a special privilege granted even to those who are the naturally born children of the responsible parents.

Adoption in the Jewish culture was very uncommon and rarely needed. The Jews gave great attention to family heritage and the family name. For the most part, if a family member died, it would be the next of kin (the kinsman redeemer— see the Book of Ruth) who would step up to serve in the name of the deceased—thus carrying on all responsibility. This was due in part to the fact that the Jews were careful to maintain their family (tribal) lineage in order to preserve their land inheritance, priestly responsibilities, royal/kingly roles—and thus Messianic line.

For the Jews (as the family of God via Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob/Israel), there was an established covenantal promise. Thus all Jews correctly saw themselves as the promised people with a promised land—and inheritance—by birth.

Although Paul’s teaching of adoption here in Romans (and Galatians 4) does not suggest that Gentiles become Jews, it does carry special meaning when considering what he is teaching in chapter 8 and will teach in the coming 3 chapters—specifically chapter 11—where he shows that the Gentile believers are grafted into the family of God by rebirth.

In the Roman world, adoption would apply to the biologically born as well as those born outside the genetic family. Moreover, adoption in the Roman culture, whether that of a biologically or non-biologically born child, placed special privileges and honor upon the adopted. Furthermore, in Roman culture a biologically born child could be rejected as heir by disqualification (again see chapter 11) and another placed in their biologically born position. Moreover, a child once adopted could never be rejected. He or she would have legal rights to permanent status, support, and inheritance.

All this said, it is of note that Gentile believers when born again by the Spirit of God are supernaturally adopted (by rebirth) into the family of God—and thus although once foreigners, strangers, and aliens to the blessings promised to the Jews (see Ephesians 2:12–13) are grafted into the blessings promised to genetically born Israelis. Moreover, Jews who refuse to trust God and believe in Jesus as Messiah disqualify themselves from the right of inheritance. Thus Paul uses the Roman model when communicating to those in Rome (whether Jew or Gentile) that they may receive (by faith and thus rebirth) all the rights, privileges, blessings and inheritance promised to biological Jews by the illustration of Roman style adoption.

Concerning the Gentile pre-Christian position, Paul wrote, “that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:12–13 NKJV).

The author to the Hebrews makes clear that Jews who were children by genetic biological covenant must trust Jesus as Messiah in order to retain all promised them from the beginnings of the covenantal call of Abraham.

I love you all, Pastor Paul