

## ADOPTION: THE ULTIMATE HOSPITALITY

### I. ADOPTION DEFINED

#### A. English Usage

The act of taking by choice into a relationship; esp: to take (a child of other parents) Voluntarily and usually by formal legal act as one' s own child. (Webster' s New Ideal Dictionary)

#### B. Biblical Usage

1. Greek word = Huiiothesia

2. Defined: Huios - Son      Thesis - a placing

To place, signifies the place and condition of a son given to one to whom it does not naturally belong. (Vine)

It is a technical legal term and means adoption, the accepting of a child as one' s own. (Colin Brown)

The act of adoption is the conclusion of any action by which any person, usually a son, is brought into a new family relationship where he now has new privileges and responsibilities as a member of the family, and at the same time loses all previous rights and is divested of all the previous duties of his former family relationship. (Zondervan Encyclopedia)

3. Limited Usage

Paul is the only biblical writer to use this term (Huiiothesia) .

- a. Romans 8: 15
- b. Romans 8: 23
- c. Romans 9:3-5
- d. Galatians 4:5
- e. Ephesians 1 :5

Note: We will look at these passages in detail later in the report.

4. An Important Distinction

Although Paul uses natural adoption as an analogy for spiritual adoption, it is important to note a distinction between the two relative to the means by which a child is adopted into a natural family, and the means by which a child enters God's spiritual family.

The process of adoption is the means by which a natural child enters into a natural family. However, spiritual rebirth, not adoption, is the means by which one is born into the family of God. Adoption has reference to God's children as sons (and daughters) of God. It refers to status.

Adoption is a word of position rather than relationship. The believer's relation to Cod as a child results from the new birth (John 1:12,13), whereas adoption is the divine act whereby one already a child is, through redemption from the law, placed in the position of an adult son (Gal. 4:1-5). (Unger's Bible Dictionary)

In Eph. 1:5 believers are said to have been foreordained unto "adoption as sons" through Jesus Christ, R.V.: the A.V., "adoption of children" is a mistranslation and misleading. God doesn't adopt believers as children; they are begotten as such by His Holy Spirit through faith. Adoption is a term involving the dignity of the relationship of believers as sons; it is not a putting into the family by spiritual birth, but a putting into the position of sons. (Vine)

We will return to this distinction later.

## II. HISTORICAL AND BIBLICAL APPLICATION OF NATURAL ADOPTION

### A. Hebrew Culture

Sons were a source of pride and a practical help to their fathers (Ps. 127:3ff). It was considered a disgrace or a lack of God's blessing for a family to remain childless, especially without male children (Gen. 30:1ff; I Sam. 1:11; Gen 33:5).

However, there is no word or term in Hebrew language or culture for adoption. Hebrew law codes made no mention of adoption. In many cases childlessness was remedied by polygamy (Abraham and Hagar; Rachael and Bilhah; Leah and Zilpah), or by easy divorce. When polygamy was practiced, the offspring were considered to have equal inheritance rights with any legitimate children.

#### 1. Examples of biblical adoption:

a. Moses - Adopted by Pharaoh's daughter - Ex. 2:10 - Egyptian

b. Esther - By Mordecai - Esther 2:7,15 - Persian

c. Ephraim & Manasseh - Grandsons of Jacob were "adopted" by him to be equal with his sons.

By this action he was able to give a greater portion of the blessing to Joseph. (Gen. 48:5)

d. Some would include Genubath (I King 11:20); and Eliezer (Gen. 15:3).

2. It should be noted that each of the above examples occurred outside of a strict Mosaic Code context (outside Palestine).

3. Jesus in my mind (although I would not want to lean too heavily upon the proposition), may be included as among the adopted. Joseph took into his house the child of Mary - not his own biological offspring.

### B. Greek Culture

Adoption served a two-fold purpose:

#### 1. Continuity of the family by providing a male heir.

This transaction could take place during the lifetime of the one doing the adopting or after death via a will. If done during his lifetime the transaction would usually include the drawing up of a will. All transactions of this kind were officially recorded in the state records.

If a man were to die childless (without male child) the state would appoint an heir which became an adopted son by law. Usually a surviving daughter would be married to the adopted son.

#### 2. A means of providing for old age.

Not infrequently testamentary adoption included the duty of providing for the adopting parent.

The adopted son entered at once into the rights of the parent and undertook out of the assigned income to keep the testator and his family to the end of their lives. Hence adoption was a way of providing for old age. (Kittel)

### C. Roman Culture

1. Adoption was a very common and important aspect of Roman law and culture.

2. A stranger could through adoption become a family member in a greater sense than some blood kin.

3. It was upon the Roman adoption concepts that Paul, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, built his analogy of spiritual adoption.

4. The following quote by William Barclay is helpful in understanding both the Roman adoption process and the adoption of believers as sons of God. He is commenting upon Romans 8:12-17.

Romans 8:12–17 (NKJV) <sup>12</sup> Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. <sup>14</sup> For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. <sup>15</sup> 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.” <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> 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.

PAUL is introducing us to another of the great metaphors in which he describes the new relationship of the Christian to God. He speaks of the Christian being adopted into the family of God. It is only when we understand how serious and complicated a step Roman adoption was that we really understand the depth of meaning in this passage.

Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and <sup>more</sup> difficult by the Roman *patria potestas*. This was the father's power over his family; it was the power of absolute disposal and control, and in the early days was actually the <sup>power</sup> of life and death. In regard to his father, a Roman son <sup>never</sup> came of age. No matter how old he was, he was still under the *patria potestas*, in the absolute possession and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and serious step. In adoption a person had to Pass from one *patria potestas* to another.

There were two steps. The first was known as *mancipatio*, and was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were symbolically used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; but the third time he did not buy him back and thus the *patria potestas* was held to be broken. There followed a ceremony called *vindicatio*. The adopting father went to the praetor, one of the Roman magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his *patria potestas*. When all this was completed, the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and an impressive step.

But it is the consequences of adoption which are most significant for the picture that is in Paul's mind. There were four main ones. The adopted person lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new family. In the most binding legal way, he got a new father. It followed that he became heir to his new father's estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them in law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out; for instance, all debts were cancelled. He was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do. In the eyes of the law he was absolutely the son of his new father.

That is what Paul is thinking of. He uses still another picture from Roman adoption. He says that God's spirit witnesses with our spirit that we really are his children. The adoption ceremony was carried out in the presence of seven witnesses. Now, suppose the adopting father died and there was some dispute about the right of the adopted son to inherit, one or more of the seven witnesses stepped forward and swore that the adoption was genuine. Thus the right of the adopted person was guaranteed and he entered into his inheritance. So, Paul is saying, it is the Holy Spirit himself who is the witness to our adoption into the family of God.

### III. NATURAL ADOPTION: AS CONSISTENT WITH GOD'S CONCERN FOR ORPHANS AND THE FATHERLESS

(Please See Appendix)

#### IV. NATURAL ADOPTION AS AN ANALOGY FOR ISRAEL'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

##### A. Text - Romans 9:3-5

<sup>3</sup> For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup> who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; <sup>5</sup> of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.

##### B. A Brief Explanation

Israel held a unique place in God's redemptive economy. He even called Israel His "firstborn" (Ex. 4:22), His own possession (Ex. 19:5), His son (Hos. 11: 1), His people, His chosen (Isa. 43:20). Yet John Murray (The New International Commentary) makes this important distinction: Israel under the Old Testament were indeed children of God but they were as children under age (cf. Gal. 3:23; 4:1-3). The adoption secured by Christ in the fulness of the time (Gal. 4:4) is the mature, full-fledged sonship in contrast with the pupilage of Israel under the ceremonial institution. This difference comports with the distinction between the Old Testament and the New. The Old was preparatory, the New is consummatory...The grace of the New (Testament) is (that) by faith in Christ...all...are instated in the full blessing of sonship without having to undergo tutelary preparation corresponding to the pedagogical discipline of the Mosaic economy.

#### V. NATURAL ADOPTION AS AN ANALOGY FOR THE BELIEVER'S RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

##### A. Past

###### 1. Text - Ephesians 1:5

He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will . . .

###### 2. Brief Explanation

God took the initiative in adoption. It was an act of His will for the purpose of bringing Him glory (v..6).

##### B. Present

###### 1. Text - Galatians 4:4-5

But when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

###### Romans 8:15

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"

###### 2. Brief Explanation

Adopted sons are freed from the law - "If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed." Christ changes bondage into sonship (Schweizer) by redeeming us from the law. He thereupon gives us His Spirit to witness with our spirit (Rom. 8:16) that we are indeed children of God. This is the current reality of our status with God through Jesus Christ.

##### C. Future

###### 1. Text - Romans 8:23

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

## 2. Brief Explanation

Having tasted of the "first fruits" of our relationship with God through Christ, believers long for the full consummation of that relationship at our bodily resurrection.

"Adoption" is used here of grace to be bestowed in the future. This does not interfere with the reality and privilege of the adoption enjoyed now (cf. vs. 15; Gal. 4:4-6). It means simply that the term is used both of a present privilege and of a future bestowment and that the latter brings to the fullest realization the status and privilege enjoyed in this life as sons of God. In this respect "adoption" is used as are the terms "salvation" and "redemption". Sometimes they refer to what is in the possession of the believer now...at other times to the consummation of salvation and redemption at the coming of Christ... "Adoption" is peculiarly appropriate to designate the glory that awaits God's people because it denotes the acme of privilege bestowed; nothing serves more to enhance the lustre of the glory reserved than to represent it as sonship come to its full fruition and enjoyment. (John Murray)

## IV. CONCLUSION

Obviously there are many facets of adoption which can be delineated from the biblical references. While one must be careful in attempting to draw support for natural adoption from every biblical reference to adoption, there are some principles that do apply to natural adoption.

1. Adoption is consistent with God's instructions for the continual care of fatherless orphans. These special folks have a special place in the heart of God and, therefore, should have a special place in the hearts of men.
2. James defines pure and undefiled religion as visiting orphans and widows. If visitation of orphans is so high on His priority list, could He possibly think less of the graciousness that motivates one to open one's home to a child for a life time?
3. Granted, many adopted children in our society are not orphans, but rather are unwanted or deserted. But is an unwanted child any less alone and in any less need of God's love to be shown to them through caring parents (adoptive parents)? While it would be God's best (reconciliation with natural parents would be His best, is it any less needful?
4. I believe that the Spirit of God elevated (the granting of status within a family context) by moving upon Paul to use it as an analogy to the believers relationship to God.

APPENDIX  
"Orphans" and "Fatherless" in the Bible

I. DEFINED

A. Hebrew Word = Yathom

1. Means literally "Fatherless," "Bereft"

The word does not strictly mean "orphan," but rather "fatherless," "bereft," and has in view the OT concept that a person was without legal standing if not incorporated into the covenant by circumcision or represented by the kinsman-redeemer. (Zondervan Encyclopedia, p. 546)

2. Translated:

- a. Orphan - Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 14:29; 16:11,14; 24:17,19, 20, 21; 26:12, 13; 27:19; Job 24:9; 29:12; 21:17, 21; Ps. 10:14, 18; Is. 1:17, 23; Jer. 5:28; 7:6; 22:3; Hos. 14:3; Zch 7:10; Mal. 3:5
- b. Orphans - Job 6:27; 22:9; 24:3; Ps. 94:6; Is. 9:17; 10:2; Jer. 49:11; La. 5:3
- c. Fatherless - Ex. 22:24; Ps. 68:5; 82:3; 109:9,12; 146:9; Pr. 23:10; Ezk. 22:7

B. Greek Word = Orphanos

1. Means properly "an orphan" (Vine, p. 82)

2. Translated:

- a. Comfortless (AV) - Jn. 14:18
- b. Fatherless (AV) - James 1:27

II. DELINEATED

A. God's View of Orphans and Fatherless

- 1. He is Father to the fatherless. Makes a home for the lonely - Ps. 68:56
- 2. He supports the fatherless - Ps. 146:9
- 3. He is the helper of orphans - Ps. 10:14
- 4. In Him the orphan finds mercy - Hosea 14:3
- 5. He executes justice for orphans - Deut. 10:18
- 6. He will vindicate them - Ps. 10:18; 82:3
- 7. He will judge those who:
  - a. Oppress orphans - Mal. 3:5
  - b. Afflict orphans - Ex. 22:22-24
  - c. Defraud orphans - Prov. 23:10,11
  - d. Plunder orphans - Is. 10:2
  - e. Murder orphans - Ps. 94:6 (God sees)
  - f. Wrong orphans - Ez. 22:7 (Judah)
  - g. Do not have pity upon orphans - Is. 9:17 (Samaria)
  - h. Lift a hand against orphans - Job 31:21
  - i. Distort the justice due orphans - Deut. 27:19
- 8. He will bless those who provide for orphans - Deut. 14:29; 21:12,13

B. God's Provision for Orphans

- 1. They were to receive a special tithe every third year - Deut. 14:29; 26:12,13
- 2. They were to be fed from leftovers of the:
  - a. Field - Deut. 24:19
  - b. Olive trees - Deut. 24:20
  - c. Grape vines - Deut. 24:21
- 3. They were to be allowed to join in the celebration of:
  - a. The Feast of Weeks - Deut. 16:11
  - b. The Feast of Booths - Deut. 16:14

### C. Other References

1. Don't prevent the justice of them - Deut. 24:17
2. Mistreatment of orphans = mark of evil and injustice - Job 6:27
3. Job was falsely accused of "crushing the strength of orphans" - Job 22:9
4. Mistreatment of orphans - mark of a godless society - Job 24:3, 9
5. Job's righteousness was (in part) measured by his help to orphans - Job 29:12; 31:17-18 (He became a father to them)
6. God's call to Judah and Israel to repent included defending the orphans - Is. 1:17
7. Judah and Israel were not defending the orphans - Is. 1:23
8. Israel's judgment was (in part) because they acted unjustly toward orphans (would not "plead their cause that they might prosper") Jer. 5:28
9. Judah would be spared God's judgment if they would (in part) refrain from oppressing the.. orphans - Jer. 7:6
10. Judah was to refrain from mistreating or doing violence to orphans Jer. 22:3
11. Edom's judgment resulted in many orphans - Jer. 49:11
12. The description of the Babylonian captivity included being without fathers - Lam. 5:3
13. Societal justice is repeatedly connected with proper treatment of orphans - Zech. 7:9,10
14. The Psalmist asked God to let the children of His enemies be fatherless and without God's grace - Ps. 109:9,12
15. New Testament references:
  - a. Christ promised not to leave His disciples as orphans ("comfortless" AV) - Jn. 14:18
  - b. True religion is defined by James as ministering to orphans and widows (those who are unable to repay) - Ja. 1:27

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barclay, William. *The Daily Study Bible: The Letter to the Romans*. Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1975.
- Brown, Colin. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Vol. I*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1979.
- Hendriksen, William. *New Testament Commentary: Romans, Chapters 9-16*. Grand Rapids, Baker Book House, 1981.
- Kittel, Gerhard. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Vol. I*. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.
- Murray, John. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979.
- New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Nashville, Holman, 1981
- Tenney, Merrill C. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1980.
- Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago, Moody Press, 1974.
- Vine, W.E. An *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*. Old Tappan, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966.
- Webster's New Ideal Dictionary*. Springfield, G. & C. Merriam Company, 1978.