

Christian Identity: Who You Are in Christ

Message 3: I Am a Child of God, part of the People of God

Imagine you are a convicted serial killer sitting on death row awaiting execution. You are guilty of every charge for which you have been imprisoned. One day the prison warden comes to your cell door and announces that you have been fully pardoned. You are now free to go. Further, the warden tells you that the governor who pardoned you has also adopted you into his family. You are to go live in his home, take his family name, and become heir to his estate.¹

This is a good picture of what God has done for believers. In spite of our crimes against Him, God has redeemed us from prison, taken us into His family, given us His name, and promised us an inheritance. Adoption into God's family is quite an astounding truth that we often take for granted.

In our Summer Sermon Series, we are considering Christian identity, and one way that Christians identify themselves is as the children of God. We are the people of God. Being adopted into God's family should have a radical impact on how we identify ourselves.

Physically speaking, a large part of our identity comes from the family we are born into. Many of our physical features come down to us through our parents. You inherit your ethnicity, hair and eye color, size, and abilities from your parents. Who you are—how you identify yourself—is largely based on your place in the family. Just like your physical family tells you much about who you are, so your spiritual family tells you a lot about who you are.

What does it mean to be a child of God and part of the people of God? And how does that affect our identity?

I. Prior to salvation, I was alienated from God, not part of his family.

People sometimes believe the mistaken idea that everyone is part of God's family; everyone is a child of God. That's simply not true.

A. In the OT, God makes a very clear distinction between His people and others.

1. God chose Abraham and his family (Gen 12:1-3), calling Abraham His "friend" (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23).

¹ Jerry Bridges (2012-03-02). *Who Am I? Identity In Christ* (Kindle Locations 537-540). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.

2. God intended Israel to be a “holy people unto the LORD thy God” (Deut 7:6).

Deuteronomy 7:7–8 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

3. In the OT, the only means of becoming one of the people of God was to associate yourself with the God of Israel (e.g., Rahab, Ruth, Naaman). If you were not an ethnic Jew or a convert to Judaism, you were a pagan, outside the covenant promises of God. There was no other nation or ethnic group that had a relationship to God like the Jews did. The Jews were God’s chosen people.

- B. In the NT, we find that Jesus told his Jewish opponents, “You are of your father the devil” (John 8:44). He made a clear distinction between “my Father” and “your father” (John 8:38). Jesus said ...

Mt 12:30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

- C. So clearly, God had his people, his children. If you were not rightly related to God, you were not one of his people.
- D. What is the spiritual condition of those who are *not* the people of God? Consider these passages in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:12 ... 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.

Ephesians 4:18–19 their understanding [is] darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; ¹⁹ who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

Trans: What is my identity before salvation? I am an alien, a stranger, without hope and without God, blind, ignorant, and unclean. I am of my

father, the devil. That's the spiritual condition of every person who is not a child of God.

Perhaps that is your spiritual condition today. If you have never been adopted into God's family by faith in Jesus, then that is your spiritual condition.

II. Upon salvation, I was adopted into God's family.

A. When a sinner turns from sin and trusts in Jesus to be saved, he becomes a child of God; he is adopted into God's family. He is no longer a stranger and an alien; he is now a child of God, a member of God's family.

B. The meaning of adoption²

1. Texts regarding adoption

Romans 8:15-17 You have received a spirit of adoption. ... 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, ...

Galatians 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons.

2. The definition of adoption

a) Adoption refers to being placed as an adult son into the family of God and given all the rights and privileges thereof. It is a legal or judicial position, the bestowal of a status or standing with God; a relationship.

In adoption God becomes the Father of believers, and believers become sons. That does not mean that we have the same status as Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus' relationship to God is different from ours. We are adopted sons; Jesus is the eternal Son of God.

For both the Jewish and the Greco-Roman culture of Paul's day, adoption meant recognizing a male heir and bestowing on him the right and authority over the family inheritance.

² This material taken from Rolland McCune, Systematic Theology notes, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary.

All believers are “sons” of God or children of God. That means that all believers equally participate in the promises and in the inheritance promised by God. By calling all believers “sons,” the Bible shows us that all believers inherit all of God’s promises.

b) Adoption bestows upon the believer the rights and privileges associated with being a member of God’s family. And God gives many rights and privileges to his people.

3. Adoption is evidence of God’s great love for us.

1 John 3:1 *Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God!*

4. Adoption is part of God’s sovereign plan.

Ephesians 1:5 *He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.*

5. Adoption is based on the death of Christ.

Galatians 4:4–5 *God sent forth His Son, ... to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.*

6. Adoption is received by faith.

Galatians 3:26 *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

7. Adoption guarantees the believer’s eternal inheritance.

Galatians 4:7 *Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.*

Romans 8:17 *And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ.*

What is our inheritance? Eternal life and heaven itself, along with all the rewards we have earned and the treasures we have laid up in store. Our inheritance is waiting for us in heaven (cf. Jn 14:2-3; 1 Pet 1:4), and we’ll begin to enjoy it as soon as we are absent from the body and present with the Lord.

C. The privileges of adoption; what are the benefits of being a child of God?

1. Being led by the Spirit

Romans 8:14 *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

This is not special guidance into the specific will of God or mystical communication with God. Being “led” by the Spirit implies being controlled by the Spirit. That amounts to obedience to the Word of God, yielding to God’s commands. One whose lifestyle is in fundamental obedience to God through the indwelling Spirit is led by the Spirit.

2. Prayer

Matthew 7:9–11 *what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!*

One of the great privileges of adoption is that we have access to God in prayer. The fact that God is our Father means that we can present our requests to him, and he will give us what is best for us.

As Jesus did, I can call out to God as “Abba” (Rom 8:15).

Abba was an Aramaic word, a term of family intimacy, used primarily by Jewish children when addressing their fathers. It implied a sense of child-like dependency but also of expectation that their father would meet their needs.³

The child of God can cry out to the holy, sovereign, almighty Creator of the universe as his own Father—what a privilege! We can be assured of God’s loving, fatherly care.

Do unsaved people have the privilege of calling upon God as their Father? No, God has no obligation to hear their prayers. They have no right to say, “Our father who art in heaven...” God is not their father.

3. Provision

God provides for his children. If you are a child of God, you can expect God to provide for your needs.

³ Jerry Bridges (2012-03-02). *Who Am I? Identity In Christ* (Kindle Locations 632-633). Cruciform Press. Kindle Edition.

Matthew 6:32–33 ... *your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*

Trans: If you are a believer in Jesus, then you are an adopted child of God. That's who you are; that is your identity. That's how you should think about yourself. You should understand and enjoy the benefits of that position.

III. Because of adoption, I now am among the people of God.

Acts 15:14 ... *God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name.*

1 Peter 2:10 [*You*] *once were not a people but are now the people of God, ...*

A. From an OT point of view, the people of God were always the Jewish nation, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. Does that mean that all the members of Israel truly saved? No, inclusion in the people of God/Israel did *not* guarantee genuine salvation. God called them “my people,” but many if not most among them were not genuinely saved.

In fact, sometimes God called them “not my people” (Hos 1:9).

The true/genuine OT people of God have always been a minority, that is, “the remnant.” Among the nation of Israel, some were saved, but the majority were not.

2. What about the NT? Are all the “people of God” in the NT sense truly saved? Yes. The people of God are synonymous with the Body of Christ/universal church. Only if you are genuinely saved by faith in Christ can you consider yourself to be a child of God.
3. Thus, we recognize a distinction between the OT concept of God's family/people (i.e., all ethnic Israelites, among whom some were saved and some not saved) and the NT concept of God's family/people (i.e., the Body of Christ, which includes all the saved).
4. BTW, we sometimes hear people claiming that God is the Father of all people—“the universal fatherhood of God.” Is that true? No, not in the sense of adoption. We are adopted when we place our faith in Christ. *Only* those who accept Christ by faith have the right to be called the sons of God (John 1:12). If you are not a child of God through faith in Jesus, then you are not part of God's family; you remain outside the people of God.

- B. The church is the household of God (1 Tim 3:15). All believers, both Jews and Gentiles, make up the people of God/the body of Christ/the church.
- C. Upon your adoption into the family/people of God, you become part of a larger whole. You are now part of the church, the body of Christ. Much of Christian identity comes from our incorporation into the church/body of Christ.
- D. Individual believers form a community—the local church is our spiritual family. That local family is part of a larger family (i.e., the Body of Christ) consisting of all genuine believers. Membership within the universal and the local church helps establish the believer's identity.

1 Peter 2:5 You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Christianity was always intended to be congregational. The body of Christ is an assembly, a church—a group of called out believers in Jesus. Each individual is part of a group, a people, a family. We live the Christian life in community as well as individually. The AH tells us not to forsake that assembly (Heb 10:25).

- E. We can see this relationship, whereby God is the Father and we are his children, as the theme of the entire Bible. God desires to enter into a relationship with us whereby we recognize God as God and he recognizes us as his children. Notice how this is repeated in all these verses.

Ex 6:7 And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: ...

Le 26:12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

Jer 7:23 ... Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: ...

Jer 24:7 And I will give them an heart to know me, that I [am] the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: ...

Eze 11:20 *That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*

Trans: God's desire is that people would recognize him as God, and then he recognizes them as his people, his children. God is calling out a people for his name; he is adopting his children into his household.

IV. Implications of adoption for Christian identity

- A. Who am I? I am a son/child of God. I am one of the people of God by faith in Christ. Adoption has placed me into the family of God with all the rights and privileges of an adult son. I am no longer alienated/separated from my Creator. I am now part of his household.
- B. I have a confident sense of security and love. God loves his children/people and has promised to provide for them and be with them. No matter what else happens, I am assured of God's fatherly love and recognition as one of His own. God is my Father, and I can call to him for help and trust in his care.
- C. I have a spiritual family. I am part of a group God has called out (note that the word "church" literally means "called out ones") "for his name" (Acts 15:14). Now I am identified with God's great name. I am no longer my own (Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 6:19-20).

Just like a bride who gives up her own name to identify with her husband, so I have given up my own name to identify with God and His people. My loyalty now stands with my adoptive family—the people of God. I must live according to the rules and traditions of His family.

Everyone else in God's family is part of my family. My relationship with all other believers, and especially with the members of my church, should be like a family. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we should have a deep sense of care and concern for one another. Our relationship to God should draw us into close personal relationship with one another.

If our relationships in the church are full of conflict, then we should seek to restore those relationships and be reconciled to one another. It's not right that members of the same family should be at odds with one another. We should try to forgive one another and live peaceably with one another.

- D. I stand in union/solidarity with all the people of God from the past, the present, and the future. I will someday be united with all the brethren of all ages (Heb 12:23).

Heb 12:23 *the general assembly and church of the firstborn, ...*

- E. I have family obligations.

1. I am obligated to obey God's commands. As part of God's family, and because God is my Father, I must obey my Father's will. My job is to please my Father, and I do that primarily by obeying his commands.

Jer 7:23 ... *Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: ...*

2. I am obligated to participate in God's "household," the church.

1 Timothy 3:15 ... *I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

I belong in God's "house," his church. I belong with the people of my church; this is my spiritual family. I need to participate in the goals of the church—evangelism, edification, worship, fellowship, service. That's what my family does.

It's amazing to me how people can claim to be children of God and yet neglect the house of God, the local church. How can you claim to be part of God's family and not be a part of God's household? It does not make sense, and it's unbiblical and out of order.

- F. I expect Fatherly discipline when I need it. If I step out of line and depart from God's will, I will experience God's fatherly displeasure, and I may fall under his strict discipline. God disciplines his children to bring them back into God's will.

Hebrews 12:6-8 *[God] scourges every son whom He receives. ... But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.*

God disciplines his children but does not cast them out of the family. Salvation for all of God's children is absolutely secure and cannot be undone. Once God becomes your father, he will always be your father. Believers fear incurring God's "fatherly displeasure" but will never experience God's wrath (cf. Rom 8:1).

- G. I have a confident hope for the future. The trials and tribulations of life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us (Rom 8:18). Our inheritance is secure no matter what this life holds. As a child of God, no matter what happens, nothing can separate me from the love of God in Christ. I am confident that my Father will give me all things that he has promised.

Rev 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God [is] with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, [and be] their God.

All of these wonderful truths about adoption are true for only one group of people—those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Jesus Christ alone to save them. If you have not trusted in Jesus, then you are not part of God’s family. If you are not adopted into Jesus’ family by faith, then you remain outside the family, separated from God and from all of his children.

If you are not part of God’s family, I urge you to join it. God invites you to become a child of God through faith in Jesus. God would be happy to adopt you and bring you into his household. It’s a great privilege to be a member of God’s family.

Ga 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Identity has a lot to do with what family you are in. If you are in God’s family, then you must believe what God has said and do what God commands you to do. As members of God’s family, we must be separated from the world and dedicated to the glory of our Father. Our identity comes from our relationship with God—he is our Father, and we are his children. That’s who we are.

I’ll finish with a “poem” I recently came across (from Steve Myers’ Facebook page):

Identity

No need to search for myself.

No need to grasp for meaning for my life or purpose for what I do.

No need to hope for inner peace, that sense of well-being for which every heart longs.

No need to hope that someone or something will make me happy or give me joy.

I no longer need any of these things because grace has connected me to you and you have named me your child.