

Adoption is an Option

2 Corinthians 6:18 HCSB **I will be a Father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to Me, says the Lord Almighty.**

Introduction: (Ephesians 1:5)

I would like to take this opportunity to address the issue of adoption with you. I would like to present to you the idea that adoption is not only an option for the barren or childless, but also for those who are able to bear children or already have children.

The official 2008 estimate from UNICEF (based on 2007 data) is there are 145 million children who have lost one or both of their parents. The lion's share, 92 million, have lost their father. Another 38 million have lost their mother, leaving approximately 15 million who are "double" orphans – growing up with neither father nor mother. Every 13-15 seconds, a child is orphaned because of AIDS on the continent of Africa alone. Many groups do not count children who are age 16 or 17. When I consider the level of knowledge and ability of most 16 year olds, it's awful that they would be considered to be adults and forced to live on their own.

We could go on and on but I think I've made my point. The issue of orphans in this world is huge. Yet, if only 7 % of professing Christians around the world responded, every single orphan in the world would have a home

According to Ephesians 1: 5, we've all been adopted into God's family.

- **Ephesians 1:5 HCSB** He predestined us to be adopted through Jesus Christ for Himself, according to His favor and will,

I believe this is why John Piper described adoption as the 'visible gospel'.

There are solid scriptural foundations for adoption as a pregnancy choice, as a means of building families, and as a solution for children without two parents. Just as we find our foundation for the sanctity of life in the Scriptures, we find our foundation for a biblical view of sexuality and the family- including adoption- in the Scriptures.

The following points can help us construct a biblical view of adoption.

1. Adoption embodies the biblical theme of the covenant

a. Adoption is more than a legal process

Adoption in strictest terms is a legal process but it is important to see that adoption is more than a legal contract - it is a relationship of promise. The relationship between God and His people is always covenantal and never contractual, and God intends that family relationships mirror His covenant relationship with us.

The adoption process may go through the courts to be made legal, but as in all parent/child relationships it becomes much more than that. Law and promise are different in principle, the first pivoting on recompense for conduct, the second being based on acceptance as an unconditional gift.

b. All families should be formed by covenants

John Calvin wrote of God's example for us in forming families by covenant:

...The Lord, who adopted his people, promised that he would be their God.....The chief part of the word [covenant] consists of promises, by which he adopts and receives us as his own people.¹

Authors Ray Anderson and Dennis Guernsey wrote about the connection between covenants and families, saying:

¹ J. Graham Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), p. 70.

Covenant or commitment is something you give to another that cannot be taken away once it is given.... This irrevocable deposit of affect we theologically call covenant and sociologically call commitment is the linchpin for a theology of the family.²

c. God's family is a covenant family

The significance of this permanent promise relationship was not lost on the apostle Paul. In the time that Paul was using the adoption analogy in his writings, his likening of the Christian faith to "adoption as sons" made sense to his contemporaries. Christians were adopted into God's family; a privilege through Christ made available to all through faith in Him.

Interestingly, according to a Roman-Syrian lawbook, a man might be able to disown his biological son if he had good reason, but he could never disown his adopted son. The adoption analogy used by Paul was a strong one indeed.

This is not to say that children adopted into families today have a greater standing than children born into a family. However, this should clarify any misconception that somehow adopted children are second-best, or not *really* members of the family. A true understanding of adoption gives us an overwhelming sense of permanence; God's permanent relationship to His children, and the permanent relationship of adopted children in their families.

In Christianity Today J.I. Packer wrote,

Paul teaches that the gift of justification brings with it the status of sonship by adoption Adoption is the crowning blessing and belongs to all who receive Christ. The adopted status of believers means that in and through Christ God loves them as he loves his only-begotten Son.³

2. Adoption upholds the scriptural emphasis on the role of the father

Although we have seen the importance of two parents, the father's role as illustrated in the Scriptures is separate and distinct from the mother's. The Bible speaks of the father as a man of compassion, a teacher at home, and a man to be honored by his children. Proverbs especially elaborates on these important roles a father can and should play in the lives of his children.

God chose to relate to us as Father. Our earthly fathers are important in modeling or being images of God as Father.

Much in today's society conflicts with the biblical model. We have denigrated and downplayed the importance of the father to the point of causing a major shift in our societal structure. For many women and children, the father - who traditionally would have provided for them - has been replaced by our government.

Estimates place the current number of fatherless children in the United States at 19 million, and the statistics regarding those children are grim:

- Half of fatherless families live below the poverty line.
- Adolescents of fatherless families are more likely to be sexually active, and daughters are more likely to become single-parent mothers.
- Adolescents in fatherless families are more likely to commit delinquent acts.
- Young adults who grew up in fatherless families were more likely to drop out of high school, divorce, and engage in drug and alcohol use.⁴

² Ray Anderson and Dennis Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family*(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), p.47

³ J.I. Packer, "Amazing Adoption," *Christianity Today* (July 1993), p. 38

⁴ Tom Hess, "Recruiting Fathers to Heal a Nation," *Focus on the Family Citizen* (October 1993), p. 2

Christians can emphasize the importance of the father by encouraging his inclusion in counseling, no matter what the outcome of the pregnancy may be. It is important to note that many women choose adoption because they see the father as vital for their child.

The forgotten contributor to the two-parent team is the father. Kids gain confidence, self-esteem, and the drive to be successful in life from their father. Without a father, children are more susceptible to peer pressure, substance abuse, and a whole host of social problems. It is not far reaching to say that a child's perception of God is often affected through his relationship with his father. A good father helps model to us and for us the love, discipline, and sacrifice that God imparts to us as His children.

A young woman--and young man--making an adoption plan can and should feel good about providing that vital part of the parenting team to their child that they may not be able to provide--a permanent, stable, capable, and loving father.

3. God has used adoption to provide for children and to further His purposes and kingdom

There are a number of examples of adoption in Scripture. Not all were cases of providing for orphans, although God specifically calls His people to care for orphans. Some were occasions of placing a child in adoption for a specific purpose, but all were cases of providing for the well being of the child.

a. Pharaoh's daughter and Moses

Moses was born to Israelite parents, Amram and Jochebed, at a time when all baby boys were being killed by an edict of Pharaoh. As the result of a plan by Jochebed to save Moses' life, Pharaoh's daughter took Moses from the river at three months of age. She recognized his heritage and knew that his birth parents had placed him in the river to save his life. Pharaoh's daughter gave the baby to Jochebed to be nursed, probably until about age five. At that time, "she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son" (Exodus 2:10).

However, we read that "Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter" (Hebrews 11:24). The book of Exodus describes Moses' subsequent forty years with his in-laws, his meeting with his birth brother Aaron, and his return to his birth family. Moses' adoption enabled him to have influence with Pharaoh yet identify with God's people, not only because of his genetic ancestry but also because of his faith. Moses did not so much reject his adoptive family as he did their sinful and unrepentant ways as a nation.

We can summarize Moses' adoption by seeing it in the context of two loving mothers whose first concern was a child - Jochebed, who parted with her child knowing that his life was at stake if he remained with her; and Pharaoh's daughter, who felt compassion on a child she knew by edict was to be killed. God used these two women to save Moses' life and provide him with a safe and secure childhood.

Jochebed's decision is a great example of a birth mother's love for her child. Her godly example sets straight the misconception that birth parents don't love their children. Her love for Moses prompted her to make the adoption plan.

b. Mordecai and Esther

Esther, an orphan, was adopted by her cousin Mordecai. The story of Mordecai and Esther is a beautiful example of respect and care between an adoptive father and daughter. We see simultaneously his love and concern for her--"Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her" (Esther 2:11)--and her respect and obedience toward him--"but Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up" (Esther 2:19-20). Their cooperation while Esther was in the king's favor saved the Jewish nation.

b. Joseph adopted Jesus

God also ensured that Jesus would have a father-figure in Joseph. Perhaps the most profound example of covenantal adoption in the Scriptures is Joseph's parenting of Jesus. Joseph clearly fulfilled the spirit of adoption by being willing to marry his betrothed who was with child that was not his. He assumed the role of Jesus' father for all intents and purposes.

The lineage of Jesus, as prophesied in the Old Testament, is fulfilled through Joseph.⁵ Joseph was fully and completely Jesus' father - participating in his naming, protecting him from danger by traveling to Egypt, teaching him a trade, and presenting him at the temple.

c. Biblical types of adoption

These are not the only examples of adoption in the Scriptures. Here are some other examples that are sometimes mentioned as types of adoptions. References are included so that you might explore them further.

- 1) Jacob's adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh - Genesis 48
- 2) Abram and Eliezar - Genesis 15
- 3) Eli and Samuel - 1 Samuel 1

The overarching theme in the examples above, as it continues to be today, is two-fold. Adoptions take place for the well-being of the child and with his best interest at heart, and as a means of accomplishing God's good purposes for his people.

4. Adoption as a scriptural metaphor

The Scriptural metaphor of adoption emphasizes the permanence of our relationship with God, the rights we have as His children, and His redemption of us

a. Paul's use of Adoption

The apostle Paul uses the adoption analogy in his writings several times, and in key passages. Because adoption was common in Hellenistic times and culture, Paul's audience could understand the Old Covenant teaching on adoption as an analogy that characterized God's relationship with His people. The scriptural idea of adoption emphasizes

- 1) The sovereign character of God in planning our salvation,
- 2) The newness of the family relationship He establishes,
- 3) Its climate of intimate trust and love and
- 4) The gracious and immense inheritance our adoption affords us.

This scriptural analogy gives us a wonderful picture of God's character and love for us as His children.

b. Many similarities

There are several similarities between adoption into God's family and a child's adoption into a human family.

Calvin wrote,

*"God's covenant was not made to last only for a few days, or for a short time. When He adopted the children of Abraham, He took them under His keeping forever."*⁶

The adoption metaphor is a compelling illustration of God's covenant love for His people and His desire to see us as part of His family. Adoptive families can experience a small piece of that in the permanence of the family God forms in their midst, and birth parents can know that they set an enduring plan into motion for their child, just as God, sacrificially through Christ, put our salvation in place. The miracle of that transfer and grafting of the child into His new permanent family is a wonderful image of our permanent place in God's family.

c. Adoption embodies the Gospel

These images and metaphors are not just helpful in our understanding of the adoption process, but can deepen our understanding of God's covenant family and His love for us.

⁵ Matthew 1:1-17

⁶ R.C. Sproul, "A Vine Out of Egypt," *Tabletalk* (July 1994), p. 18

Using simple but powerful adoption metaphors can more tangibly convey the truth of the Gospel as we seek to minister to young women, young men, and their families in a holistic way.

It should come as no surprise that the two times Paul referred to God as Abba are also the times he described our adoption by God. God sent His Son to redeem us, and God sent His Spirit to confirm His love in our hearts to create a bonding with our Heavenly Father, enabling us to come as children before Him and say "Daddy."

Conclusion:

Children placed in adoption experience God's grace in a similar way to children who are born into a family. Adopted children can feel comfort and love, knowing that a future was planned for them that was in their best interest. As children grow older this can be palpable evidence of God's direction and sovereignty in their lives.

An adoption plan, as it progresses and after it is in place, can be a powerful example of God's working circumstances for good for all those involved. God uses adoption, just as He can any human relationship, to further His purposes and to bring about wholeness and healing.

Our church's active involvement could vastly improve the prospects for adoption in our state. Adoption as a viable option should be offered to young single pregnant women, childless couples, or families who are ready to grow and are willing to demonstrate God's grace in this very real, very tangible manner.