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## **Twice Saved: The Pattern of Adoption in Salvation**

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I was born one month and two days after my fourth birthday, and I remember many of the details of that day.

My early childhood did not exactly conform to the plan that most parents have for their children. My birth mother, at the age of 18 years, survived an extremely traumatic experience, as she watched her abusive husband shoot and kill her father, and then himself, after shooting and attempting to kill her while pregnant with her second child. In her shock she surrendered her two children to her brother, turned to alcohol, and established a new relationship with another abusive man, entering into her second “shotgun” wedding with the one who would become my father. I spent my first nine months on this earth as an alcoholic, free of its influence only when I was finally born. I spent those first four years of life passed around among various members of the family when my birth mother was either too drunk or too disinterested to care for her children. My father became so chronically physically abusive of his two sons that they were ultimately taken by the New York State Department of Social Services as he was being taken to jail. My favorite description of the setting is, “the last time I saw my father, he was going to jail and I was going back to the hospital.” Those early years of neglect and abuse could only be described as dark, violent, and filled with continual fear.

But, instantly, everything changed. Upon entering the hospital this time, I would never see my parents, or hear from them again.

It is certainly common for a newborn baby to find itself in a hospital room when it opens its eyes for the first time, though it has no means to interpret what the eyes are seeing or what

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the ears are hearing. However, it is probably not so common for that newborn to vividly remember it. My first memory in this life is that of lying in a hospital bed, a state that I have learned was consistent with the poor quality of my early-childhood care. A man and woman came to my right-hand bedside and showed me some new clothes, and I particularly remember a striped red, white, and blue polo-style shirt and a pair of pants that they proclaimed as mine. I recall that this concept of owning something was new to me. I was then told that I would be leaving with them, that I would be taken to their home, and they would become my new mother and father. It was on the morning of May 9, 1955; I was a little over four years old, and my true life on this earth began on that day.

How does one draw a contrast between a life prior to such a rebirth to the one that is found after it? Never before had I known the experience of the true love of a mother and father. I found myself in a home that was at peace. In this new home was a bright joyfulness and an attitude of humor and laughter that was all new to me. If my life prior to adoption was a deep and dark prison, what I now experienced was far better than freedom. It was to experience the fullness of life and love for the first time. It was as if the sun shone on me for the first time.

I can still vividly recall the little circle of the family as we met in the small living room of our home, and included in the group was Ms. Misenheimer, the social services counselor assigned to my case. It had been a few weeks since leaving the hospital, and she had visited our home to assess the placement. Of course, at my early age, I had no understanding of who she was or the purpose of the visit. Though the question that she posed is long lost from memory, my response to the question was to go to my father, put my arms around his legs, and proclaim to all in the room, "This is my Daddy!" Apparently, that spontaneous proclamation contributed to the satisfaction of Social Services, and on December 2, 1955 the adoption became final.

With that adoption came some drastic changes in my life.

- I did not choose my new Father. He chose me.
- I would now be known by a new name.
- I now had a father and mother who devoted themselves to my care.
- I had an inheritance in this family that no court could ever take away.
- There was never a moment in my life when I wanted to return to the darkness that I was immersed in prior to May 9th, 1955.
- My new mother and father became my true mother and father, period. There are no others. Because of their love for me, my faith and trust was placed wholly with them.
- I was the most obedient child you would have ever met. Unlike many who are adopted in their infancy, I was old enough to clearly remember what my adoptive mother and father did for me, and though I was certainly as precocious and creative as any young boy could be, I made an early, personal vow that I would never cause them to regret their decision to bring me into their home. I would always honor them as the only parents in my life, and I would try my best to be obedient, at least to the extent that such a young and naive child could be.
- I would never have any contact with the old family again. They could no longer have any influence over me.
- I had unencumbered access to my caring father and mother for the remainder of their lives.

## 1. THE SURETY OF ADOPTION

**Romans 8:14-15.** *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. <sup>15</sup>For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

It is literally impossible for me to read Romans 8:15 and fail to remember the day of Ms. Misenheimer's visitation. That entire experience serves as a vivid metaphor for what God has done for all who place their faith and trust in Him. Paul is writing to those members of the church fellowship in Rome who also knew of the bondage that characterized their life prior to their salvation. However, as Paul writes, there are also those in the church fellowship who are trying to place the Gentile Christians back under the bondage of the Jewish law, a law that is impossible to keep, leading only to utter failure or debilitating hypocrisy.

As we approach the doctrine of adoption as a believer in the gospel of Jesus Christ, we should note that there are three related forms, or applications, of this act that we can know and understand. They are (1) natural adoption, (2) national adoption, and (3) spiritual adoption.<sup>1</sup> "Adoption" refers to the act "to take into one's family through legal means and raise as one's own child."<sup>2</sup> The scriptural doctrines of adoption are also referred to as the doctrines of election, or "divine election," and are often intermingled with the doctrines of predestination and free will.

Natural adoption refers to the adoption of a person into the natural family of another. The scripture records several instances of natural adoption. For example, "Mordecai had a

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1 Easton, M.G. (1993). Adoption, Easton's Bible Dictionary (CD-ROM). Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises.

2 Easton, M.G. (1994). The American Heritage Dictionary. 3rd Ed. (CD-ROM). New York NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.

cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died".<sup>3</sup> The adoption of Moses by the Egyptian Pharaoh is recorded in Exodus 2:10. "Near Eastern literature, such as the Code of Hammurabi, illustrates adoption laws, but the Bible contains no law showing the process, rights, or responsibilities involved in adoption."<sup>4</sup> However, the application of natural adoption is relatively consistent in the world's cultures, and it provides a type for the analysis of national and spiritual adoption as described in the scriptures.

Paul uses this same metaphor of adoption when he explains the nature of salvation to these new Christians. Adoption was not a common practice among the Jews, but it was a common and accepted practice among the Romans. Roman law clearly specified a sequence of steps that would be required for the legal adoption of a child by a father, a process that illustrated and affirmed the new set of relationships that would be established by law. Some of the characteristics of this practice are worth reviewing:

- Once the adoption process was completed, the original father (or mother) would have absolutely no influence in the life of the adopted child.
- All relationships with the previous family would be forever severed.
- The adopting father would, by law, become the only father of the adopted child, and he would have full and complete authority over the child.
- The child would take on the name of the adopted father,

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<sup>3</sup> Esther 2:7, NIV.

<sup>4</sup> Fink, Michael. (1991). Adoption, Holman Bible Dictionary (CD-ROM). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

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- The child would receive the full social status of the family.
- The child would be brought up in the religious faith of the family.
- The child would be in line to receive any inheritance that would be due this child if he/she were born into the family.
- In addition, unlike any natural siblings, this inheritance could not be taken away.
- The adopted child had the unique protection, under the law, that he/she could never be disowned by the adopting father.

These same set of laws are the foundation of those laws that have been enacted in most States in the United States.

### **The Progression from National to Spiritual Adoption**

National adoption is described in many places in the scripture and always refers to God's election of Israel as His own. For example, Moses, who had first-hand experience of his natural adoption by the Pharaoh of Egypt, was led by God to "Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, Let my son go, so he may worship me'".<sup>5</sup> God, was acting as the adopter as he chose Israel as His "firstborn son" to be the adopted. God called Abraham, promising that through him a great nation would come; a nation that would bless the entire world. God called the nation to a special purpose: "And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation".<sup>6</sup> However, the Nation of Israel was subject to the covenant with Abraham: a covenant based upon obedience (the old covenant) rather than on grace (the new covenant.)

As illustrated by the natural adoption of Israel, the purpose for God's election is for the commitment to service of the elect in

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<sup>5</sup> Exodus 4:22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 19:6.

His name. "Election is for service. This is not to ignore the fact that it carries with it a privilege. For in the service of God is man's supreme privilege and honor."<sup>4</sup>

Unable to fulfill the promise of obedience that God demanded, Israel wandered away from God, demonstrating that a salvation based upon keeping the law was impossible. Many scriptures describe this break between God and Israel. Consider a prophesy of Jeremiah:

**Jeremiah 3:19-20.** *"I myself said, "How gladly would I treat you like sons and give you a desirable land, the most beautiful inheritance of any nation.' I thought you would call me 'Father' and not turn away from following me. But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD.*

Hosea prophesied of the Lord's response to this rejection of God by Israel:

**Hosea 1:8-9, NIV.** *After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the LORD said, "Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.*

Finally, Ezekiel's prophesy described the glory of the Lord departing from the temple,<sup>7</sup> and for the first time since the Hebrews left Egypt, the Lord's demonstrated presence in the pillar of fire and cloud was gone. Never again would the fire come and consume the sacrifice. The glory of the Lord did not appear, and no prophet was heard for four-hundred years until the glory came back again to some shepherds on a hillside and through the proclamation of angels, announced the birth of the Christ child, through whom all people could be saved. As God had chosen Israel to receive the adoption as sons, God was

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<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 10:18.

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extending that offer to the whole world through Jesus. Paul describes this transfer of God's adoption covenant in his epistle to the Romans:

Paul defines the children of God as the "children of the promise" made to Abraham rather than as his natural children. The result of this promise is God's spiritual adoption of all who believe on His Name and respond to Him in true faith.

Some would argue that God rejected all of Israel, and accepted the Church as His adopted children, placing at odds the Christian Church and the Jewish Nation. "It was not simply that the Church and the Synagogue were two rival bodies, each claiming to be the People of God, but that the Church affirmed as confidently as the Synagogue that Israel was the Chosen People, but that the Church was the true Israel in accordance with the teachings of the Old Testament itself."<sup>5</sup> God's act of salvation through Jesus Christ opened the door of adoption to all who would place their faith and trust in Him, including "salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek"<sup>8</sup>

Just as natural adoption serves as a type for national adoption, this national adoption serves as a type for spiritual adoption. Spiritual adoption is described in the New Testament as God's choosing all of the faithful as His children, regardless of their ancestry; either Jew or gentile. Paul describes spiritual adoption in his second epistle to the Thessalonians,

**Thessalonians 2:23. *But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.***

The interpretation of these verses, "along with other related ideas such as predestination and for-ordination, has been the

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 1:16.



subject of great debate in the history of the church,"<sup>9</sup> a debate that we will briefly review.

"Paul uses the word adoption to describe the believer's relationship to God. Adoption in New Testament times was very significant. Adoption does not mean the same today as it did in the Roman world. In the New Testament, it meant more than taking an orphan child into a family. The literal meaning of the Greek word is "son placing."<sup>10</sup>

The adopting father had the authority of life and death over the adopted child. Also, the adopted child was literally purchased from the natural parent by the adopting parent. This type can be seen in many verses that describe how we, as the elect, were "bought with a price".<sup>11</sup> A beautiful example of this redemption can be found in the Revelation of John: "And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation'"<sup>12</sup>

There is little debate over whether or not those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ are adopted as God's sons. On this singular fact, the scriptures are clear and most well-known theologians are in agreement. For example, "if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God" (Romans 8:13-14, NIV) and "now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:25-26.) John relates the spiritual adoption to the natural when he states that "all

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9 Dockery, David S. (1989, Fall). A History of the Interpretation of the Election. *Biblical Illustrator*. 16(1). Page 16.

10 Elliott, E. E. (1996). *Panorama of the New Testament* (CD-ROM). Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press.

11 1 Corinthians 6:20.

12 Revelation 5:9.

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who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God -- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (1 John 1:12-13, NIV.)

When one comes to God in faith, a transformation takes place in one's life. Prior to salvation, there is truly no hope. One is ensnared by this evil, ungodly culture, in bondage to sin simply because that sin serves to separate one from God. Just as one who is convicted of a crime is separated from society and placed in the bondage of prison, one who rejects God is separated from Him, choosing instead to live under the authority of this sinful world and its impotent prince to whom we give that undeserved authority.

Those who have turned to God in faith have been set free of that bondage to sin.

***Galatians 4:4-5. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, <sup>5</sup>To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.***

Though people of faith still struggle with the temptations and consequences of their own sin, God has forgiven them of all of that sin that would otherwise serve to separate them from Him. Sin no longer has authority over one who has placed their faith and trust in God.<sup>13</sup> It is God who is now given authority in the heart of a true Christian. To turn to God in faith is to accept God as one's authority, much like that exchange of authority that is demonstrated in a Roman adoption as one father is exchanged for another. The bondage of this world no longer has control over the life of one who has been saved from it. That authority has been given to God, and to God alone. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said,

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<sup>13</sup> Romans 8:1.

**Luke 14:26.** *“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”*

Having been adopted into the Family of God, the LORD now serves as our true father. The prince of this world no longer has any authority over us. It is God who loves us, and it is to Him that we surrender our own lives. When we realize what God has done for us, and when we relate to God within the scope of His unconditional love for us, we are given the gift of access to Him. God is no longer a dispassionate judge who condemns one to death (note it is unforgiven sin as illuminated by the Law that condemns). The relationship that a Christian has with God is more like what a child has with a loving father, and when a child comes to realize and experience the true love of God, he/she can call Him by that name: Father. In fact, Paul uses the endearing form of the name, "Abba," which in our culture might be most accurately translated, "Daddy" or even more accurately, "Papa." Abba is the endearing Aramaic name (אבא), derived from the Hebrew "Ab" (אב), that a young child develops for its father, and is a proclamation that comes only from the heart.

This is where the social worker's visitation comes into play. When I went to my father, I confidently proclaimed him as "My Daddy!", as "My Abba." This proclamation was made to all in the room, a proclamation that was sincere, spontaneous, and from the heart. In this same way, Christians are called to confess their faith and trust in God in the same simple, sincere, and spontaneous manner. Had I denied my father at that meeting, the social worker could have denied me before the courts, and the adoption could have been delayed or denied. Those who deny God in this life will also be denied access to

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Him in death.<sup>14</sup> This is what it means to take the “Name” of the LORD in vain.<sup>15</sup>

Though God is deserving of all glory, honor, and praise, and though He is recognized as of infinite power, He still desires that we would approach Him as we approach a beloved father. God would not have the Law stand between Himself and His faithful children any more than a loving father would want a wall placed between himself and his own children. Paul is proclaiming to the Romans that this wall of division is broken down. Christians are to approach God as an endeared father.

**Romans 8:16. *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:***

When I found myself in that room with my new family and the social worker, I did not need the social worker to tell me that this was my new family. It was a bright 4-year old child who told the social worker that this was my family. As a young boy, I knew nothing of the laws and details of adoption. I probably did not hear or understand what the word “adoption” meant. Likewise, when one comes to the Lord in faith, they are adopted, by God, into the family of faith. God is our father, and true Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ. Christians do not need degrees in theology to tell them that they are now in the family of God. It is the indwelling Holy Spirit that bears witness to this truth. I knew I was part of the family when I was fully accepted by my mother, father, and sister.<sup>16</sup> I knew I was part of the family because of the relationship I had with them. Likewise, when we open our hearts to God, we establish a relationship with Him that needs no witness to defend it.

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<sup>14</sup> Matthew 10:33.

<sup>15</sup> Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11.

<sup>16</sup> It may have taken my sister, five years my elder, a little more time... she testified that at first I was like her pet puppy-dog!

## 2. THE ETERNAL INHERITANCE

**Romans 8:17.** *And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.*

When my father chose to adopt me, he established an agreement with the State of New York. He was required to sign a contract that bound him to his choice of fatherhood over this now-parentless child. For the protection of the child, the records were sealed by the court, and that contract cannot be broken. The contract contains no termination date or escape clause. As a result, I am an heir of my father, and my name will always be his. My part in the estate of my father was permanently established, along with that part apportioned to my sister which, under the law, carries no such future guarantee. From the day that the contract was signed, I would share in all of the experiences of this new family. I would share in their sorrows and be fully engaged in those experiences that characterize the tough times. I would also share in all of the joys that we would experience. What we share, we share together under the responsibility and authority of my father.

Likewise, Christians are adopted by God into His family. The call to faith is a call to be part of a family that is quite separate from the world-view of this pagan and secular world culture. We are given a new Father, as well as new brothers and sisters with whom we may find fulfilling relationships. If we are called upon to suffer, it is to suffer at the hands of this godless culture for the cause of the kingdom of God. However, Christians will also experience the joy and peace that comes from their salvation, and will ultimately enjoy the experience of glorification when their residence in this age comes to an end. True Christians will spend eternity with God, along with Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Creator and Judge. This is an inheritance that no power on earth can take away.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:38-39.

### 3. THE PRESENT SUFFERING

**Romans 8:18.** *For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*

Paul notes that there is no reasonable way to compare the sufferings of this present time with the glory that will be experienced in the heart of all Christians at the end of the age. Again, I see the same metaphor surrounding the events of May 9, 1955. One cannot compare the vile darkness of my life prior to that date with the light that shone afterward. How does one compare an immersion in dark and evil misery with the experience of Holy-Spirit enlightened joy? Such a comparison requires the experience of both, and those who have not yet placed their faith and trust in God also have no context from which to form such a contrast.

Ignorance of true joy can make misery seem like the best that there is. How, as a young, abused boy, could I have possibly known what life would be like after that hospital visitation? Paul's point is simple: the life that is found in Christ is the life that has a value and worth that is so far greater, that there is no point in drawing a contrast at all. The old life is gone. That old life has no hold or authority over the new.

For me to contrast life before and after adoption is impossible. God has been gracious and has allowed my mind to repress, or forget, every nuance of memory prior to the hospital visitation of May 9, 1955. I certainly have no interest in returning to those dark years. Even after meeting and establishing relationships with that birth family, observing photographs, and listening to the retelling of those circumstances, none of that memory has returned.<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, when one comes to faith in God, there is simply no point in returning to the spiritual state that we knew prior to

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<sup>18</sup> I was about 50 years old when I found the birth family after both my father and mother had died.

our salvation experience, nor can we actually experience it. There were those in the Roman church who tried to influence its membership to return to many of the bonds that they knew prior to their salvation. Paul clearly argues that to return is inappropriate; it is contrary to God's purpose of grace. We will experience pain and suffering, even after our adoption as children of God, and we certainly will experience joy, but we do so together with God. We will not face those experiences alone, but rather with the hope of our eternal salvation, and the promises of God's blessings upon those who place their faith and trust in Him. As people of faith, we can embrace God's promise that His hand of protection will never leave us.<sup>19</sup>

**Romans 8:19-21. *For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. <sup>20</sup>For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, <sup>21</sup>Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.***

Because of my background, I have always had an emotional challenge with the state of abused children, orphans, and of orphanages because I identify myself with them so closely. My wife and I once visited an orphanage perilously near Chernobyl, next to the border of Belarus and Ukraine, ministering to children who were living in what were certainly marginal conditions. Most of these were abandoned to the government by healthy, working parents who simply did not want to pay for the expense of raising them.

We were given the opportunity to select a child (or a small group of children) and bring them home to America to live in our house for the summer, receiving the commensurate medical and dental care that such a visit could afford. Rather than bringing orphans to our home, we chose to bring children from two

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19 Deuteronomy 31:8; Hebrews 13:5-6, e.g.

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established homes, from families that we had come to know, to trust, and to love. When these children would end their visits to our home, they would have something worth returning to, and though they thoroughly enjoyed the opportunities and the experiences that they had with us for the two summers that they spent with us, they were always eager to return home to their families.<sup>20</sup>

Had we brought orphans to our home in America, they would have had a response to the dramatic life changes that would be similar to my May 9th experience. They would not have that desire to return home, and their knowledge of what life can really be like would have certainly served to bring them discontent upon their return to that cold, dark, damp, and heartless orphanage, back to a life that garnered no hope for their future. For us to take them from the orphanage and show them a glimpse of what their life could have been like, only to return them to its cold and dark halls was to me only a form of heartless cruelty. To me that was tantamount to being sent back to that dark period in my childhood.

Those who have not come to faith in God are, in many ways, like the children in that big, dark, and cold, Russian orphanage. They were only aware of their immediate surroundings, and like children everywhere, they laughed and played. Yet they did so amongst the most mean of conditions, and did so through the hollow eyes of hopeless ignorance. Most knew that once they reached a certain age, they would be cast out on the streets with no support or assistance, becoming little more than hopeless and homeless vagrants until they would finally succumb to the harsh Russian winters. Yet, there were some who held deep inside a hope that someday they would be rescued, that some day a mother and father would come and take them away.

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<sup>20</sup> The three children who spent their summers in our home are now adults with families and successful careers of their own as they still live in Belarus. Also they accepted faith in the LORD while staying with us, took that faith back to their families, and now raise their families in faith.



Those who are lost, who have not experienced the embrace of God's loving arms, are laughing and playing in that dark orphanage, separated from the love of a family that some do still hold some hope for. However, unlike those Russian children who have almost no true hope of salvation, God offers salvation to all who will simply place their faith and trust in Him. It is as if God were to enter the orphanage and offer that abundant life to every child there. It would be as if loving parents were lined up at the door, offering a May 9th experience to every child.

In reality, some of those children would probably prefer to stay in the orphanage, afraid of the dramatic changes that adoption might bring. Likewise, many who are lost find it difficult to make that decision to submit their hearts to the LORD. Their refusal is not necessarily because of their vanity, any conscious rebellions against God, nor because of their unwillingness, but rather because of their lack of hope, and their resistance to the gospel, a state of ignorance that has been seared into their world view by a lifetime of hopelessness, informed only by the similar spiritual ignorance of those who surround them.

God does not desire that we would wallow in our hopeless state. God's plan is that we would be delivered from our bondage to hopelessness, a hopelessness that is the very nature of sin's consequence. God offers a glorious liberty as members of a new family, His family. Like the thrilled and expectant parents that approach the massive orphanage doors, God approaches the heart of the lost person. All the child needs to do is to meet the parents and submit to their grace.

The process of adoption starts long before the parent meets the adopted child. The deliverance of the child from the orphanage had nothing to do with the child, and everything to do with the love that the parents had before they ever met the child. I did not choose my father. My father chose me.

The world is sick. "The main idea is that the entire cosmos is affected by the vanity of humanity from the time of Adam because of sin, depending on the situation and destiny of

humankind, the main depredator of the planet.”<sup>21</sup> When my adopted father found me I was small, sick and infirmed, exhibiting all the characteristics of a failure to thrive. Yet my father reached into my hospital bed, lifted me from the sheets, and took me home. Likewise, God's love for the people of His creation precedes their knowledge of Him.<sup>22</sup> God came to us when we were still sinners<sup>23</sup> to deliver us from death. All we need do to receive an eternal life with Him is to allow Him to put His arms around us, lift us up, and carry us home.

**Romans 8:22. *For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.***

The state of the lost, the un-adopted, is one of groaning and travailing. Many may think that they eat, drink, and are merry, yet in their heart they know their lost state. Like the children who play in the dank Russian orphanage, they know deep in their hearts the hopelessness of their future. What people seek in the depths of their heart is what is found only in the grace of God. People search for peace, yet they cannot find it in the myriad of things that they fill their lives with in the searching. People try to find happiness in the gratification of worldly and sensual desires, only to find emptiness and exhaustion. Some may find a temporary and rationalized happiness in some of the events of an apostate life, but that life will always lack the illuminating joy and deep, abiding, peace that only the power of the Holy Spirit brings.

Prior to the coming of the Messiah, the person of YAHWEH incarnated in the life of Jesus, creation did indeed groan and travail with little hope. Israel had been given the knowledge of God, had experienced His powerful presence, and still rejected Him and chose apostate paganism. When Israel left the

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<sup>21</sup> Ham, Adolfo. Toward a Cosmic and Holistic Mission: A Biblical Reflection on Romans 8:14-24a. *International Review of Mission*, 106 no 404 Jun 2017, p 116-120.

<sup>22</sup> Jeremiah 1:5.

<sup>23</sup> Romans 5:8.

protecting hand of the LORD it was destroyed as a nation. A period of about 400 years of spiritual darkness ensued when there was no prophet with a new prophesy. The Glory of the Lord that had illuminated the Temple had departed Jerusalem during the Babylonian exile. All creation awaited the Son. Without the Messiah there was no hope, so it was in the Messiah that the Jews placed their hope. It was not until that Glory of the Lord returned to be seen by shepherds and heralded by angels that the moaning and travailing of mankind would find remedy in the coming of Jesus Messiah and the proclamation of salvation by faith that had been only an open mystery until that time.

#### 4. THE BELIEVER'S HOPE OF SALVATION

**Romans 8:23. *And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.***

The lost are not alone in their expectation. Christians have realized the benefits of adoption as God's children, and as they continue to grow in their faith and in their knowledge of the grace of God, they do find more of the peace and joy that a relationship with a loving God offers. However, as adopted children we also remain in an un-adopted world. We are immersed in a world that is depraved and in rebellion against the one true God. We are touched on every side by this apostate and pagan society that, with the powerless prince of evil, would seek to draw us away from our faith. Because of this, Christians also have a future hope, a hope for a future time and place where we will be freed from the consequences of our immersion in sin's continual presence. Christians look forward to that time when the fruits of faith will be rewarded with sight: the full expression of witnessing God in His Glory.

Christians have been adopted into the family of God, so it is not this adoption to which Paul refers to in this passage. I might draw the metaphor of adoption out to a second date: December

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2, 1955. This is the day that the adoption that started on May 9<sup>th</sup> was declared complete, the case was closed by the courts, and all records were sealed forever. One can only imagine the expectation that was held deep within the hearts of this mother and father between May 9<sup>th</sup> and December 2<sup>nd</sup>. On that date, their status as parents of this orphan would be made complete. There would be nothing standing between them and their adopted child. Likewise Christians look forward to that day when there will be nothing standing between themselves and the God who loves them.

**Romans 8:24-25. *For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.***

What does it mean to have hope in something that is not seen? How can one of those Russian orphans who is surviving in marginal circumstances have any hope of a better life? If one only reads the first few words of this verse, one might come away with a heretical position that it is your hope that saves you. Hope does not save any more than a child's desire to be adopted will empower the adoption. Paul describes "saving hope" as that hope that has confidence in what is yet unseen. Paul speaks specifically of a hope that patiently accepts as truth that which is unseen and unexplainable. What Paul is speaking of is a hope that forms the foundation of true, saving faith.

Paul clearly teaches that salvation comes only from faith in God, and that salvation comes only as a gift of God's grace, something that we do not deserve, yet something that God offers. It is not something that we can earn, but is rather something that God freely gives. It is faith in God that accepts this gift that saves one from the condemnation for their sin that they truly deserve. What good would it do if we know of God's grace, if we believe that all of what God's Word says is true, yet we never take that step of faith by trusting in Him? This is the stand that is taken by satan. It is our faith and trust in God

that gives us a hope in Him that cannot be compromised. Satan knows God and knows of God far better than we, but it is we who have been adopted as His children, we who have placed our faith and trust in Him.

#### **4. THE HOLY SPIRIT'S INTERCESSORY ROLE**

**Romans 8:26-27.** *Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup>And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

As Christians, our knowledge of God is still not entirely complete. God has adopted us as His children. We have accepted Him as the Father and authority of our lives. Still, we struggle with the consequences of our own temptation with sin, and we suffer the consequences of the expression of sin by ourselves and others. We truly desire to be obedient to God, yet we still transgress against God and against the Holy Spirit by our attitudes and actions as we struggle to balance a deep and sincere commitment to God with a necessary commitment to the world. If we were fully submitted to our commitment to God, no such conflict would exist. However, we still fail.

We can praise God that He understands our struggle, and despite our infirmities, He is always there waiting for us in the quiet recesses of our heart. We lack the wisdom to be fully obedient, and we lack the wisdom to be fully expressive of our desires for obedience. However, as frustrated as we may become, the Holy Spirit, the seal of salvation, never leaves the heart of the Christian. What we lack in wisdom the Spirit fulfills. When we cannot even come up with the words to pray, the Spirit knows the true nature of our heart and the details of our circumstance, and His presence alone literally fills that prayer for us.

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Just as there was a May 9<sup>th</sup> that brought me safely into a new home, the process of my own salvation was not yet complete. The home that God brought me to was one that was also a home that was founded on Christian faith. It was a home where attendance in church was more than a tradition, and it was in that consistent attendance that I became to learn of another Father who had been waiting for me for a very long time. When I looked back at my worldly adoption I realized that God's plan for all people was for the adoption of those who would turn to Him in faith.

Just as I fully immersed myself in this new family of my childhood, and just as I proclaimed my allegiance with my new "Daddy!", God calls upon the people of His creation to submit themselves to Him as their loving Father, and to proclaim aloud their decision to follow Him. When I made this profession of faith at the age of twelve years, doing so in front of my church fellowship, the proclamation of this new life of adoption was clearly on my mind, and was aware of the part that my faith in the LORD played in it. Why would I want to go back to the life I had prior to my adoption? Why would anyone want to return to the darkness that they knew before they came to God in faith?

As you place your faith and trust in God, He adopts you as His own child and the following process takes place:

- You did not choose your new Father. He chose you.
- You are now known by a new name: Christian.
- You now have a father that is devoted to your care.
- You have an inheritance in heaven that can never be taken away.
- You no longer have a desire to return to your life prior to salvation.
- Your hope is now entirely in God, and no longer in any temporal authority of this world.

- It is your desire to be obedient to the LORD because of what He has done for you. You have no desire to cause Him to regret His decision to adopt you
- The old, secular, and sinful world now has no authority over you.
- You have unencumbered access to God from the moment of salvation through all future eternity.

This is the message that Paul had for the Roman church. Being tempted by heretical interests to turn from their faith and return to bondage, the Roman Christians needed to hear the solid doctrine of grace that Paul proclaimed. Rather than return to the bondage of the law, Paul encouraged them to return to the truth that they knew, and to listen to the Holy Spirit that dwells in their hearts so that they can really come to know and realize the peace and joy that comes with the undeniable and unshakable inheritance of God's family.