

**Introduction**

In Matthew 10:32 the Lord Jesus says, *“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.”* A little earlier this morning we had the privilege of witnessing Ed becoming a member of this church by publicly professing his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ before us all. The greatest part of those affirmations and promises that Ed made this morning are to do with this one major point: I acknowledge and declare that Jesus Christ is everything to me!

Arising out of that declaration of his faith, Ed also made some important commitments. He made some commitments about what he will seek to do, with God’s gracious help, in order to live in a way that is consistent with that faith. And he also made some commitments to this particular church, this particular congregation of the Lord’s people which he is now a part of.

Nevertheless, the core of what we witnessed this morning was a profession, or an affirmation, of his faith in Christ to save him from his sins. Now I’d like to just point out that this is an affirmation of something that has already taken place. We certainly do not believe and teach that the question of whether a person is saved or unsaved depends on whether or not they join a church. When a person joins a church it should be because they are already saved, already belong to Christ, and therefore wish to publicly unite themselves with Him and His people.

So the question I would like to ask this morning is: Just what HAS already taken place? What are the things that must have occurred in a person’s heart and life before they can truthfully make the declarations and promises that Ed has made this morning before God and us? What has happened, to bring him, or any other true Christian, to this point?

We could answer that question in a couple of different ways. One way of answering would be to talk about the STEPS by which a person is brought to a saving faith in Christ. If you look at your outline, you will see a list of what we deduce from Scripture are the steps by which a person goes from being unsaved to saved. And if you look at Romans 8:29-30, that we read earlier, you will see where a lot of this list comes from. I’d just like to read those two verses again: *“For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”* Without going into that in a lot of detail, you can see very clearly that there is a process, a series of things that have to happen to those who are being saved. There is a progression: Foreknowledge, predestination, calling, justification, glorification.

These are all very important concepts that are important for us to grasp and seek to understand as Christians. Nevertheless, today I am not planning to spend a lot of time talking about the STEPS or the PROCESS by which we are saved. I don’t want to talk so much about how Ed got to where he is today, as where he is now. I want to concentrate not so much on the PROCESS, as on the RESULT. What has happened to this man?

The core of the answer to that question is to be found in Romans 8:14-15: *“For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 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.'*" From Scripture we know that there are many facets to our relationship with God. If we think about some of the many names that are used for the three persons in the Godhead, this will become obvious very quickly. God is referred to at different times as Father, King, Master, Lord, Redeemer, Creator, Comforter, Protector, Defender, Mediator, Advocate, Friend, and so on. There are truly many facets to our relationship with God.

Nevertheless, at the very core of what has happened to Ed, and to every true Christian, is the fact that he or she has been ADOPTED to be one of God's sons or daughters. He or she has been brought into a new family. He or she has been brought into a new relationship. He or she can truly, in the fullest sense of the word, call God FATHER.

So today I would like to consider this most basic and central aspect of our relationship with God: our SONSHIP. And I would like to do so under the following three headings:

Being adopted by God means:

1. **I BELONG to God.**
2. **I am an HEIR of God.**
3. **I am LOVED by God.**

1. **I BELONG to God.**

The first implication of this teaching that we are adopted by God, is that we are not the sons of God to begin with. We read in verse 14 that "*as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God*"; but verse 9 says that "*If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.*" Our natural state, therefore, is that we are not the children of God to begin with. When we are born, we are outside the family of God. The universal testimony of Scripture is that we are born sinful, and therefore we are estranged from God, and unable to approach Him. Ephesians 2:12 is especially clear. The Apostle Paul is speaking to the believers at Ephesus, and he says to them that before they believed, "*...at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*"

That is a very sad and terrible situation to be in. The Bible often draws a contrast between being the people of God, and the people of the world. We either belong to God, or to the world. Now there are those that think that that's not so bad. They feel that they know where they belong. They are quite comfortable in the world, they like the pleasures of the world, they enjoy doing as they please, and they are not interested in coming to God at all. But that is actually a terrible situation to be in, because if we belong to the world, Scripture tells us that actually we belong to Satan. Turn with me to John chapter 8. In verse 42 Jesus says to some of the unbelieving Jews who were debating with Him, "*If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God.*" But of course they didn't love Him, they hated and opposed Him. And so He goes on in verse 44 to put it even more clearly and terribly: "*You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.*"

In other words, the Scriptures teach us that we either belong to God, or to Satan. There is no middle ground. And that means that in our natural state we are a lost, doomed people. We are fools and slaves, destined for eternal punishment, truly having "*no hope*", as Paul says in Ephesians 2. But when we are adopted by God, all that changes. God takes us and makes us His. Now let's just think about what that involves, here in the world. When a couple decides to adopt, they choose who they are going to adopt. They choose the child, the child does not choose them. But it is not just a

matter of choosing a child and taking him or her home. There are certain legal requirements that have to be met. In the case of a child from another country, it may well be necessary to show that the child is healthy, and not carrying any diseases. There will be certain fees to be paid, sometimes quite expensive. But eventually, every legal impediment is removed, and the child is considered officially to belong to his or her new parents.

There are many similarities to this process, in the way that God takes us and makes us His own. I am not going to take a long time to consider them now; as I said earlier, this morning I am more concerned to speak about where we are now as God's children, than how we got there. But just consider quickly that God chooses us, rather than us choosing him, just as it is up to the parents, not the child, to choose whether they will adopt that child. Further, God overcomes every legal impediment to our adoption, paying whatever is necessary, just as the parents do everything that is necessary to overcome every impediment to the adoption of their new child. In our case, this involved sending His own Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross in our place, to pay the penalty that was due for our sins, in order that God's perfect justice might be satisfied. When God chooses to adopt us, He does whatever it takes to make us His!

And then we belong to Him! No longer are we lost and forsaken. Once we were not His, but now we are! We have been rescued from the punishment that was due to us. We have been rescued from the realm of Satan. And God names us as His own!

## 2. I am an HEIR of God

Secondly, being adopted by God means that I am now an HEIR of God. We see this very plainly in Romans 8:16: "*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.*" In other words, this is no second-class sort of adoption! One reads stories sometimes of children who have been adopted, but with the aim of making them a sort of unpaid slave, rather than truly welcoming them into the family. They are a bit like Cinderella, not treated as if they really belong.

But God does not treat us like this. When He adopts us, He truly adopts us as His sons and daughters. The answer to the question in the Westminster Shorter Catechism: What is adoption? is: "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God." When God rescues us from our sin and reconciles us to Himself, He does not simply say "There you are, I have rescued you; you may now live and not die," and then turn His attention elsewhere. Nor does He say "There you are, your debt is paid; I have bought you for myself, and you are now my hired servant." He does not even say "There you are, I have welcomed you into my household; now go, take the lowest place at my table, for although I acknowledge you, and am glad to have you with Me, there are many others who are nearer and dearer to Me than you are." No, God says to us: "Welcome, my son, my daughter. Come and join all your brothers and sisters. You are part of this family now, as much as any other. Christ's blood has paid the penalty for your sins, just as for theirs. His perfect righteousness, the perfect life which He lived on earth, satisfying all my laws, is now counted as yours, just as for all your brothers and sisters. Justice has been satisfied. Every requirement has been met. I have done all that is necessary, and now you are My child, as are all these. You are all my heirs, princes and princesses, children of the King. You are all part of my family. Every one of you has the right to all the privileges of my sons and daughters. Every one of you has a part in all the promises I have made to my children. You will enjoy eternal life forever with me, in the heavenly mansions that I have prepared for you. You will reign over the new heavens and the new earth with all your brethren. You are my child, you are my heir! When God adopts us, He adopts us truly as His sons and daughters.

### 3. I am LOVED by God.

And that means that there is one more aspect to our adoption – the most important aspect of all. It is that this new relationship is based on mutual love! This must surely be the case. No matter how well a couple here on earth might care and provide for their adopted child, if they did not love them, we would consider them poor parents, hardly worthy of the name. And God is certainly not a poor parent to us. When He adopted us, He set His love on us, a love so surpassingly great that we read in Rom 8:37-39: “...*in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” God truly loves us as His sons and daughters, and nothing can ever separate us from that love!

But now I want to ask a very important question: How do we KNOW?

How do we KNOW we are sons of God? This love of His for His adopted children sounds so wonderful. But how do I know it is mine? How do I know that I, personally, have been adopted by Him?

The answer is to be found in 8:15-16. Let’s read that again: “*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.*”

What is that teaching us? That is teaching us that there is a dual witness within our own hearts that we are the children of God. Firstly, there is the witness of our own spirit, our own soul. In our own heart of hearts, if we love God, if we love Christ, we will know it! But secondly, Scripture teaches us that when we believe, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells within us. He is the One who renews us, who causes us to be born again, who gives us spiritual understanding, so that whereas once we were blind, now we see. And therefore, since He is always present with us, He bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. God Himself gives us that inner certainty. Our own spirit unites with the Holy Spirit to convince us that we do in fact belong to God, and are loved by Him!

Now sometimes this might seem difficult for us to understand. We go looking for some sort of a feeling, some sort of a conviction, and if we don’t find it, we may begin to wonder: “Am I REALLY saved? Am I really a child of God? Or am I just kidding myself?” But let me ask you a question. How do you know that your earthly father loves you? Or your mother, or your spouse, or your child? How do you know? Is it not so that we feel it in our hearts, as something we are sure of? There are many pointers – the way they speak to us, the things they do for us, the sacrifices they make for us – we can point to all of these as evidences of their love for us. And yet, I believe it is true to say that our sense, our assurance of that love, is greater than the sum of all those pointers! We love with our hearts, and it is with our hearts that we know and recognise the love that others have for us!

And so it is with God! Read Rom. 8:15 again: “*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’*” The term “Abba” is not a Greek word, the language in which the New Testament was written, but an Aramaic word, the language Jesus spoke while on earth. The closest English word for it is “Daddy”. It is a personal term, an endearment, a word expressive of love and childlike trust. So what these Scriptures are saying to us is that when we become sons of God, He sends His Spirit to so work in our hearts that we are filled with love towards Him, and with a childlike trust that His love is fixed

on us. We may KNOW that we are the sons of God, when we find in our hearts that inexpressible feeling of love and trust towards Him, the love that a child has for his father, the love that knows it is reciprocated. It is not fully expressible in words; but it is certainly there, and cannot be denied.

Often, of course, this assurance, this sense of love, seems to be dim. Sometimes we can be very insecure in our love, needing constant reassurance from the promises of the Word of God. We feel like it is too good to be true, and we find it hard to rest in it. We are insecure in our relationship. We are like an adopted child who wants to trust in her parent's love, but is fearful that somehow it is all only temporary, and before long she will be sent back to the orphanage. She needs to be told over and over again that she does belong, that she will never be sent back. We can be like that, doubtful and insecure. But does that make the relationship any less real? Of course not! And generally, as we grow in that relationship, we will become more and more confident and assured that God really does love us, that we really are His.

At other times, because we are still sinners, we sadly often treat God in ways that we would not dream of treating our earthly father, or our spouse, or our children. We forget about Him, we neglect to speak to Him. We sin against Him, doing things in full view of Him that we know He hates. We are too fearful to stick up for Him when His enemies lie about Him and abuse Him. Sometimes we may even act ashamed of Him. God gives us this wonderful relationship with Him, the relationship of a father to His child, and again and again we act against that relationship.

We should not be surprised, then, if at times God seems to be distant from us, perhaps because we have offended Him, we have acted in some way that is damaging to our relationship with Him of love and trust. If at times we feel less assured of His love towards us, very often it is because of this sin of ours. But again – if we cause our father on earth to be angry with us, are we not yet, deep inside, still assured of His love? We know we are in the wrong, we know he is right to be angry with us, yet in our hearts we know that he loves us yet! So it is with us and God, if we are truly His, for He sends us the Spirit of adoption, who works in our hearts and causes us to experience the love that the Father has for His sons, and the sons for their Father.

And so I close by asking: Do you know this love in your heart? What is your relationship with God? Can you say, with rejoicing, that in your heart you know that He is your Father and you are His child? Can you say that Christ has redeemed you personally, that God has adopted you personally? If you can, rejoice in it, and determine in your heart to do only what will build that relationship up, and nothing that will tear it down.

But if you cannot say that – if you are still in bondage to the world and the desires of your own sinful heart, and do not yet know what it means to love God and be loved by Him – then I urge you to seek Him. Cry out to the Father, and beg Him to shine the light of His love upon you. Cry out to Christ His Son, and beg Him to take away your sins that have estranged you from God. Cry out to the Holy Spirit, and ask Him to enter your heart and renew you, and dwell within you. Cry out to God to make you His own, to adopt you as His son or daughter. He is a gracious, compassionate God, and He will not reject those who truly desire Him. He will set His love upon you, and you will learn to truly love Him from your heart.

Amen.

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