

Growing up as a farmer's son (or a farmer's daughter) – different people have vastly different experiences. Some of my peers, grew up with a real sense of 'privilege' (somewhat the landed gentry spoiled brats); Others (and I think I would've fitted into this category) were pretty-much the lowliest worker on the farm.

And that's where my mind went, when I was reading this, when Paul said **4 I** mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything,

Alright, one day, that child might rule the whole farm, and he'll be the boss of all the workers... But not while he's a child. While he's a child, there's guardians and managers, who oversee him, and train him, so that he can one day, run the enterprise. But for now, he's little more than a slave, and the most menial of tasks, is where he begins...

Today, we're going to be talking about "adoption" and "sonship". And I'm going to be really blunt here, and some folk might hate me for saying it:

For us to really understand this, we've really gotta get away from our post-modern ideas of 'justice' and 'equity' and the way these (for us), revolve around 'sameness'... And particularly for us, I think we need to step back from any current understanding of:

- sons vs daughters;
- male vs female;
- glass ceilings; and
- misogynistic paradigms...

and to understand what Paul is saying, we have to enter into the world as it was in Paul's day, and grapple with the Word of God this morning.

Things have changed a lot today, but in the **ancient** world, the first-born **son** was truly privileged...

But even today, farmers have a saying, *"It's cheaper to pay for a wedding, than a farm"*.... coming from the tradition that the **bride's** parents pay for the wedding, but somehow, the farmer has to scrape together enough to buy a farm for each of his sons... And if you're a girl, don't get cranky with me – that's just the way it was in the past...

To be an heir, was and is, truly a privilege... And in Paul's culture, that meant being a son...

As a child, the heir would live under a guardian – they'd be pretty much a slave... But when the heir was no longer a child – when the heir became an adult, they had the full privilege of being the son... No longer would they be 'pretty much a slave' – they become the boss of those who were once the boss of them...

What's Paul's point? V26

²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all **sons** of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.

Alright, now I want you to understand this:

Before we come to faith in Christ Jesus, none of us (men or women) were sons of God. Those who were living as Jews, liked to think they were Sons of God,, but they weren't – they were like children – living as slaves under the law, which was their guardian, keeping them in order for the time when Christ would come.

But now the time has come. God has sent His Son – the Lord Jesus Christ, to redeem us – to buy us back (why?), **so that we might receive adoption as sons.**

To be adopted as a Son of God, means to be given all of the rights & privileges of a son...

It's quite a common formula, in a kids story/fairy-tale, to be given an image of someone who's sort of tacked on to a family, but they never truly belong. (often they're an orphan) So, think of:

- *The ugly duckling – this little baby swan, is in the family of ducks, and it never really belongs, and it's teased by the other ducklings, and it's part of the family, but it doesn't fit and not fully accepted...*
- *Cinderella – mistreated by the ugly step-sisters – she's part of the family, but doesn't really belong – doesn't have the same rights and privileges as the step-sisters – “You have to be our slave – you have to mop the floor – no, you're not allowed to go to the ball” ...*

- *For a more recent fairy-tale, think of Harry Potter – the nephew who lives in a cupboard under the steps – part of the family, but not really – being a slave and not treated as a son...*

If Gentile Christians (non-Jewish Christians), are adopted in to the family of God – is that the way we are incorporated into the family of God? (ugly duckling; Cinderella; cupboard under the staircase). Not at all...

To be adopted as sons of God, means that we're not (at all) on the outer... Because it's through God's son, that **we** become His sons, He fills us with His Holy Spirit – the Spirit of His son, becomes a part of who we are...

Chapter 4: 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" **7** So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

You know, when some of us come to church, we sort-of-just dabble around the edges – not sure if we truly belong... Do you ever feel that way???

Perhaps you weren't brought up in a Christian family, and so you're not sure if you really belong... Worried you might say/do the wrong thing...

Or maybe you were brought up in a Christian family, but you rebelled against God... And maybe you feel that the things that you've done, aren't really, completely forgiven... And you feel you have to sort of stay on the outer...

We need to hear this, and we need to understand this: At one time, we were minors – that means, we ³ ... were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

(sons like the ugly duckling? Cinderella?... No... Full sons. Full adoption. All rights. All privileges... Heirs of the Father...)

⁶ And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Do you know what that means??? "Abba", is the Aramaic word for "Dad"... To call the Father "Abba", isn't a formal address, that you give to a stranger – it's about familiarity; relationship; the closeness of Dad and son...

⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

So, how does all that happen??? He's telling us we become heirs of God (sons of God). How do we get so firmly embraced into God's family???

Through faith....

3:27 For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

To me, this passage, is some of the most amazing words, that we will read in the Bible. It's telling us how, in the church, no Christian is better than another Christian... Oh yes, we have different rolls, but not one of us, is closer to God than another. Not one of us, is 'sort of' in the family of God, but doesn't fully belong... We are all one in Christ Jesus...

Let me explain that:

28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

This is **not** saying, that we are all the same. It's **not** saying we're not different... What it **is** saying, is **all** of us, who come to faith in Jesus Christ, and are baptised into His Name – **All** of us, belong, and we belong together...

At one time, the **Jews** belonged as the people of God – not the Gentiles... but through faith in Christ, we are **all** adopted as **sons**. – Jew and Gentile together / Men & women / slave and free – It doesn't matter what ethnicity you are/sex/strata of society– we are all adopted as full sons – full heirs of

promise... And what an amazing blessing this is – to be an heir of God the Father...

What about a slave? Could a slave become a Christian? Let's be really clear here – Slaves were considered 'property' – they were owned by their masters. If another person owns me, does that mean that I can't fully commit to Jesus???

You see, for a slave to become a Christian, that didn't stop them from being a slave. For a gentile to become a Christian, that didn't change their ethnic heritage. And for a woman to become a Christian, that didn't change her gender, or make her genderless...

This is about belonging, and about being a full member of the body of Christ...

Yes, a literal slave, even though he remains a slave, through faith in Christ, joins the family of God, and fully belongs in the family of God – even a slave, is a full member of the body of Christ.

there is no male and female

Some of our modern translations of the bible, change the scriptures in various places, to make them sound more inclusive. But if we do that, we miss the whole point... If to soothe our sensibilities, we change the Scriptures to talk about sons and daughters of God, we miss the whole point... He doesn't make us sons and daughters of God – He makes all of us "sons of God"... We are all full heirs... And the Son of God, lives in male and female, so both man and woman, belong as full members, to the body of Christ.

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

But, let's not get confused here: Oneness \neq sameness...

What's it mean for us to all be one in Christ Jesus????

Well, Paul sometimes talks about how we are (together), the body of Christ.... I can't be the body without you. And you can't be the body without me. And the body of Christ, is unity in diversity... We have unity of faith/belief (in the one Lord Jesus Christ)... And we come together as the one Body of Christ... But we are all so very different.

And so, to the church that Paul was writing to, some were:

- Jews/Greeks (enormous racial division)
- slaves/free (sociological divide)
- men/women

And here in St George, some are:

- white/black
- employers/employees
- bushies/townies
- men/women
- young/old
- fit & healthy/feeling like they're barely holding on to their health/sanity

And yet, in Christ, we are all brought together as one... And if any one of us are missing, then part of the body is missing...

And even when God gives us spiritual gifts, there is unity in diversity (1 Cor 12)... We are all different, **and** we have different gifts, but together, we are one in Christ Jesus.

- Some will have the gift of healing, but not all;
- preaching & teaching, but not all;
- prophecy, but not all;
- speaking in other languages, but not all;
- serving;
- compassion;
- praying;
- helping

but not all...

We all have different gifts, and together, we are one in Christ Jesus...

You know, sometimes we humans tend to focus on the wrong thing (focus on ourselves)... And we make this passage about us. Sometimes, we start comparing ourselves to others. And we see it as a hierarchy and “I’m equal to you”... And we view it in terms of ‘roles’...

- If I have a role of preaching and teaching in a church, that doesn’t mean that I’m any higher than anyone else in the church – it just means, that’s the ministry I’ve been called to...
- Or if you’ve got a gift of playing music...
- I’ve heard people use this very verse to try and justify same-sex-marriage – If there is no male or female, and we are all one in Christ, then what does it matter who I marry...

What a nonsense... He's not talking about sameness... Men and women are not the same. He's talking about how (through faith) **all** the baptised into Christ Jesus, belong, and we belong together...

My heart grieves, whenever anyone tries to create a boutique church... Do you know what I mean by that?

It's if we try to create a church for a certain segment of the community. And you'll only really belong in that church, if you're from that segment of community...

Alright, so in the deep South of the USA, you'll probably find churches for white folk, and churches for black folk... You find that appalling, don't you...

I do too. But I also find this appalling:

- If a church claims, “This is a church for the young people.” – all the young people come to this church – all the oldies – you go to the other church;
- A church for blue-collar workers / white collar;
- those who have a certain spiritual gift;
- indigenous / non-indigenous;
- business people & professionals / unemployed...

I find all of that, absolutely appalling...

The Christian church, means we all belong, and we belong together...

You see, we're not supposed to focus on ourselves. What's the focus here? The focus is on Christ. The focus should always be on Christ.

- ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.
- ²⁷ For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.
- ²⁸ for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

- in Christ
- into Christ
- put on Christ;
- one in Christ.

It's not about us. it's about Christ, and it's about **His** body. It's about being one in Christ. And I find this, an immense joy... Do you??? To be one in Christ... To belong... Together... In Christ...

Let's pray.

Heavenly Father,

What a privilege it is, to be adopted into Your family.

To be a son of God.

To be an heir of promise.

Lord, we thank You for the gift of faith;

for the faith we have in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You, that we have been baptised into Christ;

and put on Christ;
and that we are one in Christ;

And Lord, we thank You,
that You have filled us with the Spirit of Your Son.
That we may call to You, Abba, Father.

You are no stranger to us –
You are our Heavenly Dad...

Lord, help us to live, as one in Christ Jesus.
People who are very different to each other;
and yet together,
To bring You Glory,
in Jesus' Name,
Amen.