

I will never forget what I heard a little four year old girl in Walthill, Nebraska say four years ago. The Vacation Bible School lesson the mission teams were presenting that particular day was on how God is our Heavenly Father, and this little girl started to look increasingly angry. Finally, someone asked her what was wrong. "I don't want God to be my heavenly father!", she said. "My father beats me. I don't want God to do that too." No amount of reasoning or persuading could change her mind - the fear she had of her earthly father had closed her mind to the idea of God being a great heavenly father.

Just last month, I spent almost a week in Walthill with the mission teams from here at Grace Reformed and two other PCA churches in our state, and once again we spent one day in Vacation Bible School talking about how God is our heavenly father. And once again we had people in the community tell us about the state of so many families on the Reservation and how good parental figures are lacking in the lives of so many of the kids. I had to wonder how many of the kids really could connect with what was being said in VBS, or at least understand it the way we meant it. How many of them instead would have thought of negative connotations -- that if God is a heavenly father, then he would be distant, unpredictable, absent, arbitrary, uncaring, unreachable, or someone of whom to be terrified.

Yet as today's sermon text shows us, it is this very doctrine -- that God is our heavenly father -- that should dispel our fear, give us freedom, and reassure us that we can have a close relationship with God! Romans 8:14-17: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." (Romans 8:14–17)

The first point on your outlines, if you're following along that way, is the **basis** of our adoption. On what basis can we call God our heavenly father? Paul says, "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God." So we see that being called sons of God, and having this privilege of calling God our heavenly father, goes with being led by the Spirit of God. OK, so what does it mean to be led by the Spirit of God?

We can look at the context of this passage for more insight into this. In this section of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul is contrasting living according to the flesh -- according to human nature and human ability or the lack thereof -- versus living by the Holy Spirit. In verses 8 and 9 of Romans 8, Paul wrote, "Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him."

So then the question bears asking -- how do we have the Holy Spirit -- the Spirit of God, or the Spirit of Christ -- the third person of the Trinity? In Acts 2:38, we read: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"

So simply put, the basis for our having the Holy Spirit, for having the privilege of calling God our heavenly Father - is our salvation. Christians are called to salvation -- effectually called, the Westminster Catechism puts it. The Holy Spirit works faith in us. The Spirit convinces us of our sin, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, renews our will, and both persuades and enables us to receive Jesus Christ. In John 14, verses 16-18, Jesus said the following about the Holy Spirit: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans: I will come to you." And in verse 26, "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

But as we continue to look at the basis for our adoption, I need to be careful to point out one key thing: adoption and salvation are not synonyms. They do not have the same meaning and can't just be used interchangeably. Adoption is one of three benefits of salvation, or in the language of the Westminster Catechism, one of three benefits of being effectually called. The three benefits are justification, adoption, and sanctification. In fact, you may actually be more familiar with the other two terms than you are with adoption. We do tend to talk a lot more about justification and sanctification, wherein justification is a legal term that has to do with our being declared righteous, and sanctification refers to the ongoing process by which the Holy Spirit makes us more like Christ. We focus a lot on justification, and for good reason: theologian J.I. Packer calls justification the primary and fundamental blessing of the Gospel. Guilty sinners have been legally declared as righteous because Christ took those sins upon himself. But Packer also says that while justification is the primary blessing of the Gospel, adoption is the highest privilege the gospel offers.

You see, not only do we have a legal declaration that we are righteous because of Christ's suffering in our place, called *propitiation*, but we have also been chosen by God the Father to be adopted into His family. And because that is, and should be, more than our human minds can even comprehend, God has given us the Holy Spirit to remind us of this -- and to lead us, to show us what we ought to do as adopted sons of the Heavenly Father.

Now one more thing -- what is this about being "sons"? Why not "sons and daughters"? Is Paul being sexist here, as some contend, which has led to some Bible translators deciding to be inclusive and changing "sons" to "children" or "sons and daughters"? Actually, it seems his intent here is the word "sons" and at the same time his intent is anything but to be sexist. In the culture of the day, women and children tended to be looked down on, and seen as lesser than men. Families almost always valued sons over daughters. But in the family of God this cultural hierarchy is broken down. Consider Jesus reaching out to the Gentile woman at the well in Samaria. Or the good news being preached to Lydia and her family in Philippi. Or Jesus welcoming the little children and infants to Himself in Mark 10. Galatians 3:28 - "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." By saying all are adopted as sons, Paul seems to be alluding to this equality -- the highest privileges belong to all believers -- direct access to God the Father and rights of inheritance are not just limited to men, but are for women too. Those led by the Spirit are sons of God -- all children of God are on equal ground with one another. No one is superior to or inferior to another. Not males and females, slaves or free, or even adopted or natural born. Commentator F.F. Bruce writes that "in the first century Roman world, an adopted son was a son specifically chosen by the father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate. He was in no way inferior to a son by birth."

This leads us into the second point on your outline,

The Benefits (of adoption).

The first benefit is that we are not slaves but sons. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons."

Within the last couple years, there was a story on the news about a woman who had adopted a son, and then when he got to be around seven years old, decided he was too much for her to handle and decided something along the lines of, "it's over, I'm sending him back." Now as those who know me pretty well could probably tell you -- maybe I don't want to ask anyone to back this up -- I am normally an easy-going person. But there are a few things that can really get me feeling pretty riled up. One is when someone in a position of being a guardian or protector or shepherd knowingly hurts someone in their care, or causes them to fear. Another is when someone suggests that adoption is a lesser family tie than natural birth. Not only does that cause a lot of hurt, it flies in the face of all Scripture teaches about the family and adoption! That particular woman effectively did both! Not only was the life of this little seven year old guy, who already needed a lot of help, completely shattered, but around the country, a lot of people actually sympathized with her and echoed the same sentiment -- that an adoption ought to be undone if it just didn't work out. That it's just not the same as a natural birth. And then the Russian government shut down adoptions to the United States for a while, as the seven year old had once been adopted from Russia, making it so a lot of other children were denied opportunities to be adopted into welcoming, safe, loving homes.

And then here in Nebraska a couple years ago we had a debacle of our own with that Safe Haven law, where while I think it was well intentioned, it left a loophole where parents could drop off their kids, even up to age 18, at a hospital and absolve themselves of parental responsibility just like that. They gave birth to them, raised them for years, and all of a sudden, had a way out... and some took it. Are you kidding me?!?!

What does this say about how much our culture values the family? Is it saying that if things get tough, or the kids don't live up to performance standards, it's OK to just dissolve things and let them go? If so, is it any wonder, then, that when we say God is our heavenly father, then people like that little girl in Walthill may at best say, so what, and at worst, run from God because of the connotation? If the institution of family means next to nothing, then what are people going to be left to think about the family of God? That it's there only for the good times, but you better not have hard times? That God the Father will love you as long as you keep his standards, but if you let him down, three strikes and you're outta here (if you're even that fortunate)? Is that what's being communicated in homes, churches, seminars, and books?

I guess this sentiment is nothing new, but it's a lie straight from the pit of hell. Like so many other things Satan uses it against us to weaken our faith, to try to damage our relationship with the Heavenly Father, and to give us reason to despair. You see, if we feel insecure before God the Father, what are we going to do? A couple things. We might get really critical of ourselves and others, having to do things to boost our resumé, maintain a good appearance before God and others -- often at the expense of those who aren't doing the same thing. In doing so we basically turn into slaves once again -- slaves to our own performance, slaves to others' opinions, slaves to appearances. We become trapped with no apparent way out. And then we may start to feel desperate and depressed. We realize that nothing is ever enough and even our best efforts fall short -- and then we fear. Fear what others will say, fear that they'll find out who we really are, and ultimately, fear God's impending wrath on us for not measuring up. We become self-absorbed, fearful, joyless perfectionists laboring toward an unattainable goal. So then what do we do? The same as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden when God came looking for them. We hide. We don't want others to know we don't measure up. Most of all we don't want God to know. We get really good at wearing masks, hiding the truth, and eventually, coming awfully close to convincing ourselves that we are just fine -- and you know, pretty righteous too. At least compared to the next guy over there. When that happens, we've forgotten the Gospel. We've forgotten our justification. We've forgotten our adoption.

This summer, the GRC high school graduates, college students, and 20 somethings are going through a course called Sonship. (If you are in that age group and not attending yet, I highly recommend it. Lunch and study is right after church today at the Tripps' and we'll be continuing this topic, of God as our heavenly Father.) Jack and Rose Marie Miller were the organizers of much of the material, and in the course Rose Marie tells of how she had fallen into this. And finally her husband Jack had to tell her the hard truth. "Rose Marie, you act like an orphan. You often live as though the Holy Spirit never came, could never help you in impossible places, and do impossible things. You act as though there were no Father who loves you."

How prevalent is this? How often do we forget that we have a Heavenly Father that loves us unconditionally, sympathizes with our weaknesses, and has adopted us into His family? Quite often. Maybe that is why Paul had to remind the churches over and over of this reality. Today's sermon text is from Paul's letter to the Romans. In the Scripture reading before the sermon, we heard a parallel passage from Paul's earlier letter to the Galatians. He also wrote to the Ephesians, in chapter 1 verses 3 through 6, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." (Ephesians 1:3-6) In fact, in all his epistles, he greets the churches with grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. And not just Paul, but Peter and John also make mention of God the Father in their opening statements. The theme of the love of God the Father runs throughout First John, including 1 John 3:1. "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are." This is just such a vital truth -- but one we so often forget. And so we have to be reminded over and over again. Because we don't remember. We sin. We get ashamed. We get hurt. We think the Father doesn't see. We run. We take offense. We become unthankful. We read our failed human relationships into our relationship with God. We think he'll let us down, write us off, or just forget us. And so we hide. And decide it's safer to just live life by ourselves in our own strength, like an orphan. But God the Father is not that way.

One of the best illustrations of the character of the Father comes from the parable of the Prodigal Son. Remember the younger son had taken his inheritance and squandered it and, in deep shame, decided to return home and see if he could work for his father as a servant, because at least the servants had more than enough bread to eat. We often look at this parable from either the perspective of the younger son and his sins, or from the perspective of the older son and his refusal to accept his younger brother. But there is a third aspect -- the younger son's status with his father.

In Luke 15, starting at verse 16, we read of this younger son: "And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

In the eyes of this Father, who represents God the Father, even though this son had disrespected him, squandered his inheritance, and done immoral acts, he not once ceased to be his son. And despite what he had done, when he came back home, it was not a time for judgment but rather rejoicing. His son was back! Transferring him from the status of a son to a slave was simply out of the question, even though it is what the son's own condemning, guilty heart thought was all he deserved. He had lost sight of his status as a son, but his status as a son had not changed.

Another benefit of our adoption into the family of God is that we have a close, intimate, familial relationship with God the Father. "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"

The word Abba is an Aramaic term that was used by Jewish children to address their father -- especially in an emphatic way. It would be a parallel to the English word, "Daddy". It's what a child would say to show he loved his dad... or what a child would say when she was in distress and really needed her dad. Other than here in Romans 8, and the parallel passage in Galatians that we read earlier, there is just one other place in the New Testament where we find this word used: in Mark 14:36, Jesus, in great distress in the Garden of Gethsemane, said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." -- as He prepared to go to the cross and experience the Father's wrath in our place -- enduring deeper agony than any of us could possibly face even at our lowest moments.

Because of our status as children of the Heavenly Father, and because of the Holy Spirit's indwelling us and enabling us to cry out to God, we have this same privilege -- we, too, have access to God the Father, and can cry out to him, "Daddy!" Like Jesus cried out in the Garden, we have been given the same right having been adopted into the family of God -- we can go to the Father in times of distress. In times of struggling against sin. We can go to him whenever -- because He is our father and He has chosen us and placed us into His family!

But even still, that orphan mentality rears its head and a lot of times we don't live as though this were true, that we are loved by the Heavenly Father and called His own and have this close relationship. Like the Prodigal Son, so often we lose sight of our status as sons. Satan persuades us to think it's too good to be true, that because we still sin we aren't really seen as perfect in the eyes of God, and so we're not really sons. We haven't kept up the family name. That if we're lucky, maybe God will still let us be his slave... maybe... but that's about it. But one of the Holy Spirit's roles is to continually reassure us of our standing, and actually, it is because of the Holy Spirit's indwelling us that we are able to have this closeness to the Father in the first place!

Continuing in Romans 8: "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ"

And not only do we have this closeness to God the Father, but we have all the blessings, all the perks of being in the family. As with Roman adoption, where a man would choose to adopt a son in order to pass all he had on to him, God has done this with all who are His children. By placing us in His family, He has chosen to give us the full range of benefits -- later in Romans 8, at verses 28-30 we read "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." For Christians, we're in the family, predestined, called, justified -- declared blameless -- and then we'll be glorified. We have the inheritance of spending eternity with God, the Father, in heaven. Forever. What did we do to earn that? Nothing at all. We were chosen and adopted, and justified, being declared blameless. What can we do to lose it? Nothing. We were chosen and adopted, and justified, declared blameless. The Father finds no fault in us because when He looks at us He sees the righteousness of Christ, His son -- He sees perfection. How amazing is that?

The third point on your outline is, the bond -- or the guarantee. There is one more thing - the last part of verse 17. "...provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him." Now this sort of sounds like the bad news. Maybe you were thinking, "I KNEW this all sounded too good to be true." Well, here's the thing about family. You're in it together. We're in it together. And Scripture is clear that as Christians we are not immune to suffering. No, the world will hate us for His sake. Philippians 1:29 - "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake." Mark 13:9 - "But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them." But here's the thing. Is God still with us in those times? These are times when Satan, ever seeking to get us to doubt our standing before God the Father, to want to retreat into ourselves, doubt our adoption, doubt the Father's goodness -- when he seems to sound the most convincing.

But God has assured us otherwise. Isaiah 43:1-2 "But now thus says Yahweh, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." And also 1 Peter 5:10 - "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you."

This life isn't easy. We may face hardship all the time. We may be rejected, disappointed, hurt, persecuted, abused, let down, scorned, attacked. We may have things happen to us that seem to make no sense - how could they be part of the plan of a loving God? Sometimes it seems like God is distant. That if His promises are true, why does it seem like He is not keeping them? Why does it take forever for Him to come through? Yet if you remember nothing else from today's message, make it be this -- *through everything, if you are a believer in Christ, God is your heavenly Father and He will not let you go*. He hasn't promised everything will be easy, but He has promised He will never stop loving you. And He will always be with you. And you will always be in His family, with Him, for eternity.

Now in application I want to specifically address three groups of people.

First, those of you who really do feel confident in your status as adopted sons and daughters of God the Father. You know that you have been justified, that you are viewed as blameless, you are loved, you are His, you are free -- you are no longer slaves or orphans. Encourage your brothers and sisters. Communicate this unconditional love in your earthly relationships. Are those around you secure in their standing? As you have been loved unconditionally, do you love unconditionally? Are you pouring love on orphans? Does your life communicate freedom and security to others? Remember Galatians 5:13 - "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." And pray that you will continue to have the strength to stand strong. People who are truly free and confident in their standing are a huge threat to Satan and believe me, he is going to do all he can to get at you, to try to shake your faith and get you to doubt.

Second, maybe some of you here are really having trouble with this idea, that God is your loving heavenly Father and you are loved unconditionally by Him. You know, if I had to guess, I'd say most of us are in this category -- I don't think anyone this side of eternity will always, 100% of the time, be totally confident. If so that's awesome. But if we're really honest with ourselves, which we have got to be free to be -- because our justification and adoption mean that we don't have to keep up appearances to pad our good-works resumés. Author Mike Mason said, "Christians no longer need to pretend to be better than anyone else. We don't have to put on any show of being good, for we know we are not. We are not good—we are forgiven; and so we are free to be honest before God and before others. We are free to be ourselves." So again, if we're honest, I think most if not all of us would have to say we're here in this group.

It could be for a multitude of reasons.

One is that maybe you feel strong by yourself. You're tough and self-reliant. But that's orphan behavior! As Rich Mullins put it, "we're not as strong as we think we are!"

Or maybe you feel weak. Maybe you are like that little four year old in Walthill a few years ago. The concept of God as a heavenly Father is too hard for you to grasp because of what the term Father means to you. Maybe all you knew as a child was fear, unpredictability, and beatings. Not just physical beatings either... verbal beatings can leave even deeper scars. And you've heard people say, or you've read books that say, that oh, we need to be always in fear of a holy God -- lest he be angry with us. And so even now you're fighting against this message, wanting to stand up right now and say it's just not so, that if I only knew there's no way I'd be saying that God is a *loving and forgiving* heavenly Father. That I'm diminishing from God's standard of perfect holiness. Yes, the Bible does say God is holy, to fear Him, that God is a righteous judge and so on. But remember this - that wrath that we deserved was poured out on His Son in place of all Christians. It's been poured out. It's a done deal. I can say this with confidence -- if you have trusted in Christ for salvation, if God has led you to that point, God does love you in a way you maybe have never known before. Somehow even your seemingly lost past can be transformed into a wonderful future. Be encouraged with 1 John 4:16-19. "So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but **perfect love casts out fear**. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us."

There are other reasons why this concept may be hard to hear. Maybe what comes to mind when you think of a father is not fear but rather distance. Maybe in your human relationships it's been all too often that people aren't there when they say they will be, or they're there for a time and then they're not. Or they're just unavailable when you need them most. It's sad to say but that's a fact of life on this fallen earth. Human beings hurt each other and let each other down. This year, in Walthill, a team member and I heard a different little girl exclaim happily upon getting home, "My daddy! He's home, and he's not drunk!" To her, having her dad home -- and sober -- was not something she could count on. Her father is not predictable or the same from day to day. She never knows which side of him she'll get.

Maybe you had a similar situation. Maybe a parent left you and your family when you were young. Or just was never there. Or gave you away. Or died. One way or another they just weren't there when you needed them. So then if that's what you expect, or if it's even all you have ever known, you might find it hard not to view your relationship with God the same way. When you hear of God as Heavenly Father, the first thing you think is someone who's just not there. You might think he's far off, distant, too holy and too many things on His mind to really care what you are going through. That when you need Him most, or you just want Him to be there, that He won't be.

But He himself promises in His word that He will be there. And He keeps His promises. Matthew 6:26 - "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matthew 10:29-31 "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." Deuteronomy 31:8 "It is Yahweh who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed." These are but a few of the many promises God has made in His Word that He will not leave us.

As beloved children of the Heavenly Father, there will be times we must be disciplined by Him, as Hebrews 12:6 says. "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." But even in this, it is because He loves us, not because He is angry with us, that we experience His discipline. Remember it is of such importance to God the Father that we be reassured of His love that He gave us the Holy Spirit, and our text today reminds us of that. *"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God."* God the Father knew we would struggle with this. That in this fallen world, with even our own families torn apart by sin, we would need to be reassured that what we experience is not normal. But that He takes our past, our histories, our present situations, and welcomes us anyway. The Spirit reassures us that the Father's love is perfect. That perfect love casts out fear. So as the Spirit guides us in sanctification, one more way He does this is by reminding us of God's love -- and orchestrating things -- even using difficult times -- so as to put us in a position of falling into and experiencing God's love. He even turns hard times into blessings so that through them our self-reliance fails and we can then experience the Heavenly Father's love.

There's a paragraph in the first book of Lord of the Rings -- not in the movies, sadly, about the land of Rivendell. "Such was the virtue of Rivendell that soon all fear and anxiety was lifted from their minds. The future, good or ill, was not forgotten, but ceased to have any power over the present. Health and hope grew strong in them, and they were content with each good day as it came, taking pleasure in every meal, and in every word and song." The author of a blog I read recently commented that this is a picture of what God has given us in Christ. Our adoption is such that while our troubles are not forgotten, they have no power over us now. Our adoption frees us to live this way. We are free from others' opinions. We are free from the guilt of our sin. We are free from having to build a performance resumé to be accepted. We are free from the chains of family histories, though we may still bear the marks.

Later this year the Olson family will be adopting a baby girl. There will be a lot things she inherits from her birth parents. But by virtue of her adoption, she will have a new name, a new future, a new father and mother, new brothers and sisters, a new identity. And so it is with all Christians, all adopted children of the Heavenly Father. How? Because of our justification, and our adoption into God's family.

One more thing for those in the second application group, which is probably almost all of us. Maybe you have trouble understanding God's love because you are sure you have not done enough good works for him to love you. Maybe you grew up thinking you only had a place in your family if you did the right things, never broke the rules -- or at least never broke the big ones -- and basically earned your family's affection if there was any to give in the first place. Maybe you were adopted and grew up thinking you were inferior to a natural-born child. Maybe it was more than just you thought that; maybe it truly was that way. Maybe you had a sibling disowned or cut off for not keeping "The Rules". You always worried you'd be next. Maybe you are an outcast yourself. Maybe you've been told that it's the same with God -- you have to perform or He'll let you go. You were lied to. (pause) I repeat, you were lied to. God is not that way.

Third and finally, maybe some of you here do not know God as your heavenly father. You do not know if you have been adopted into His family. You do not have that relationship with him. This might come as a surprise if you've heard or believe that all people are sons or daughters of God -- you've probably heard the phrase, "we're all God's children." Well, no. This requires being justified -- being declared righteous -- and being adopted into God's family. If that has not happened, you are not currently in God's family. You're an orphan right now. You're a slave right now -- a slave to your performance, to the law, to your own works -- ultimately, a slave to sin, because no matter how hard you try, it doesn't change that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) But if you know this is you -- and you want that to change -- it may be that God is opening your heart to Him, bringing you to Himself, calling you into His family. Do you have a desire to believe in faith that your sins have been transferred to Jesus, who died in your place, so that you could be declared righteous? Tell Him. Ask Him to change you, to give you the faith to believe.

In January, we had the privilege of having "Peculiar People" here with us for a weekend. One of their *sketches*, entitled "Billy", depicts some of these truths about God's adoption of us. We have permission to show it; due to the copyright, though, we can't have it in the sermon audio so I have to ask that the sermon CD be paused now.

Video Clip - "Billy"

Resume recording please.

Billy finally got it. And if you are a son or daughter of God the Father, then may you go from here today laughing like Billy was at the end of that sketch, because you can't do anything one way or the other to change how your Heavenly Father loves you, and in whatever happens to you on earth, good or bad; no matter what anyone else thinks of you, or does to you, you are secure in your Heavenly Father... you really are free... because He loves you. He cleanses us and welcomes us into community with our new brothers and sisters in baptism. And in the Lord's Supper He invites us to join in union with Him, together with our new family, our brothers and sisters. for a meal. You're in the family and there's freedom here. And if you don't have that relationship with the Heavenly Father, is He tugging at your heart right now, causing you to want that relationship yourself? To no longer be an orphan? To be free?

Let's pray.

Adopted into Freedom

Romans 8:14-17 - July 10, 2011

I. The b_____ of our adoption

*Packer: Justification - primary and fundamental blessing of the Gospel.
Adoption - highest privilege the Gospel offers!*

II. The b_____ of our adoption

a. Not slaves but _____.

b. C_____ to God the Father (Abba Father!)

c. Assurance from the H_____ S_____.

d. We are h_____.

III. The b_____ (guarantee)

Application

Scripture Sheet

7/10/11

Romans 8:14-17 "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

John 14:16-18, 26 "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." 26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

Gal 4:6-7 "And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." **Eph. 1:3-6** "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved."

1 John 3:1a "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are."

Luke 15:16-24 "And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

Mark 14:36 "And he said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.'"

Phil. 1:29 "For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake..."

Is. 43:1-2 "But now thus says Yahweh, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." **Gal. 5:13** "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." **1 Jn. 4:18-19** "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us." **Mt. 6:26** "Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" **Mt. 10:29-31** "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows." **Deut. 31:8** "It is Yahweh who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.'" **Heb. 12:6** "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."