

INTRODUCTION

Video: "I Like Adoption" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rztYMMhMT2Y>

Jl Packer: *"If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God's child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all."*

Child of God is the pinnacle of our identity in Christ. The other identities are like building blocks: being made in the image of God establishes our fundamental dignity as human beings; then when we are regenerated and made new creations; then once we are born again, we are adopted as children. *Family* is the defining relationship in the NT between God and His people.

So Romans 8:14-17 needs to be rooted in our heart. The passage talks about three aspects of this identity.

I. IDENTITY OF THE FATHER

One trouble that many have with the doctrine of adoption is their view of God is colored by their experience with their human father. Whether their father was harsh, absent, or lenient, we all come to God a little *biased*.

What kind of father is He? V. 15 says we call him: *"Abba, Father."*

- *Abba* is Aramaic for "father." Some say it's a very personal term (i.e. "daddy")...
- But the real significance of it is: Jesus spoke Aramaic. When he talked about the Father, prayed to the Father...he called Him *Abba*.
- So the fact that we also call Him *Abba*, the implication is that (by our union with Christ), the Father's relationship with Jesus now becomes ours.

So to know what kind of Father He is to us, let's look at what kind of Father He was to Jesus. See a few examples of that in the gospels...

A. Authoritative

John 6:37-38. We see this repeatedly in the life of Jesus: his submission to God's authority.

1. We might distrust authority

Many of us understand this dynamic. In certain cultures, father is to be respected and has authority over the whole house. This could make us suspicious of God b/c:

- We might have a distrust of authority (the world does)
- Or we may have had fathers/authority figures who abused their authority

2. But not all authority is bad

I had field-level access to a D-Backs game last week and walked by their security office. I saw guards armed to the teeth – scary-looking guys – but it made me feel really safe. The goodness of authority depends on how authority is used. What does God do with His authority?

- He has authority over all **CREATION**. All creation is at His disposal (“even the winds and the waves obey Him”). What does God do with that authority? Uses creation to provide for us.
- He has authority over all **TIME**. He knows all things. What does He do with it? Uses all things to work for our good.
- He has authority to **JUDGE**. What does He do with it? He used that authority to judge His own Son on our behalf.

Power in the wrong hands can be a scary thing. But power in the *right* hands is our comfort. I’m glad my Father commands all things. I’m glad my Father commands my life. Better Him than me! I love His rules. I want His will done. Because He is both strong AND good.

B. Loving

1. The love of God for Jesus

What can we say about the love of God? Many songs about it, but the greatest picture of His love is that which He has for Jesus.

God’s love for us is an amazing thing. But if that’s removed from God’s love for His true Son, which we have through adoption made possible by the cross, then we run the risk of over-romanticizing His love. Then we end up loving God’s *love*, more than loving *God*.

How much did God love His Son? See Matthew 3:16-17. Couple things that stand out in this account:

- He declares His love. God doesn’t waste words. When He declares something, He means it. He declares His love for His Son.
- And He declares that He is pleased with His Son. A holy, authoritative God...we might imagine it’s hard to please someone like that. Yet, with His Son He is “well pleased.”

2. The love of God for His people

So then, IN CHRIST, that is who the Father is to you.

- He declares His love for you
I never heard those words from my father. To this day, he only shakes my hand. This Father is different. He makes it no secret! He declared His love on a hill outside Jerusalem. He declares it on every page of Scripture. He declares it time and again through the Spirit in our hearts.
- He is a Father who takes pleasure in His children.

You understand God in a different way when you have children. I will never forget when my sons were born. When they're newborns, you know what parents do? They take pictures of every random thing they do. Their kid will blink and they think it's a big deal. If you have friends with kids, you know they post pictures of their kids doing things nobody cares about except them. That's parents! Sometimes when they're sleeping, I will just go look at them. When my boy is up to bad, the whole world stops.

This is the disposition of the Father to us. It pleases Him to save us. It pleases Him to love us.

C. Near

Jesus on the night he was betrayed and deserted, says this in John 16:32: "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me."

1. The unbreakable bond

This is a point where understanding the Trinity is crucial. One God in three persons, but it's not just that there are different roles, there's also a *fellowship* within the Trinity. There's a bond within the trinity between God the Father and God the Son. The Father is not "with him" just in the sense of being around, but Jesus is talking about perfect unity. Later he'll say: "The Father is IN me, and I IN Him." That's why the disrupting of this bond on the cross was so painful to Christ. It's unbreakable. Even the cross did not break it (only momentarily disrupted).

2. Inseparable

This is why nothing can separate us from the love of God...in CHRIST. Don't miss that part in Romans 8. Once you understand union with Christ, you see it everywhere in the NT. Christ is inseparable from the Father, therefore, so are we!

He is not an absent Father. He's not distant. He is always near. Not, as long we've been good. Not, only when He has time. Always.

This is the Father. As I mentioned, our relationships with our earthly fathers sometimes complicates things. I'm not downplaying the need for healing and counseling, but ultimately the TRUTH sets us free. The truth about God and the kind of Father He is. There is truly no one like Him. Even the best fathers on earth can't compare.

II. THE IDENTITY OF THE SLAVE

It's in light of His identity, that we know ours. Going back to Romans 8: to describe our identity as children, it contrasts it with the opposite identity – that of a *slave*. We need to know this one too because it describes non-Christians, and even sometimes the way we, as Christians, act.

Whenever the Bible talks about spiritual slavery, generally referring to two kinds of slaves...

A. Slave to the law – fear of disapproval

1. One – is a slave to the law. That described most of the Jews Romans is addressed to. They didn't have a proper understanding of OT law. They saw it as: *"we have to follow these rules and God will approve of us."*

That's the perception of many non-Christian and some Christians. As much as we might know about grace, we're still performance-oriented when it comes to God. Understandable, because that's how everything else works.

2. But as a result, we live in a world of shame. Shame of not being good enough. If we get a bad grade – first thought is: *"Parents are gonna be so angry."* If we're not "successful" – we're embarrassed to talk to people about what we do. Even with God – we feel shameful for not having been "good Christians."
3. That's slavery, because the motivations is fear – fear of disapproval. I read an article about Ichiro Suzuki, one of the greatest baseball players of all time who has accomplished everything. Yet, he's still obsessed with getting better because he was never good enough for his dad. Even as a mature adult, he's still seeking approval from his dad.

When approval (whether from God or people) depends on performance, that will only lead to fear and shame.

B. Slave to the flesh – fear of disappointment

1. Other kind of slave is a slave to the flesh. This is the person who is driven by their selfish desires. Addicts are the most obvious examples. But we can all be addicts in our own ways. Some are addicted to love. Life revolves around finding someone to love them. They can never be happy unless they have somebody. Some are addicted to attention. Life revolves around being recognized or respected. Some are addicted to control. Everything has to be a certain way, people have to be a certain way.
2. Whenever we find ourselves saying: "unless I have this...I can't be content," we've become slaves. Our desires have become our master.

And this leads to fear also – fear of disappointment. And that fear makes us work and work and work so that we can make sure we're never disappointed. Or that fear paralyzes us from ever taking chances.

We fear getting close, because we might get hurt. We fear the future, because our plans might not succeed. We fear taking steps of action, or being vulnerable.

But, if you're in Christ, that doesn't have to be us.

III. THE CHILD

Who is the child of God then? **If the slave is driven by fear. Then the child is driven by confidence.**

We cry: “*Abba! Father!*” Only Jesus used that word. People were shocked when he said it. “*That’s too loose. That’s too presumptuous.*” Only a rightful child can say that. By the Spirit of adoption, that’s us now.

A. No fear

1. Child of God has no fear of disappointment because we already have what they’re looking for!
 - Already loved – we don’t need to fear not being loved
 - Already significant – we don’t have to manufacture that ourselves
 - Already secure – don’t need anything else to provide that for us
 - Already approved
2. Might not be approved by people in our lives, might not be approved by our human father, but we are approved by the heavenly Father.

God is pleased with you. Some of you need to hear that today: Your Father is PLEASED with you.

Parents have these moments when we overflow with pride over our children. “That’s my boy! That’s my girl!” Can you imagine the pride and joy Jesus brings to the Father? He is that pleased with you. Cannot be more pleased with you.

Maybe you never heard that from your dad. I know I didn’t. Maybe you never heard: “*I’m proud of you. I’m pleased with who you are.*” **In Christ, every bit of that is true already.** That’s the word. “*You HAVE BEEN received as children.*”

B. Do you believe the gospel?

That’s the gospel. You have, what you couldn’t have, in a million years, earned. You have every blessing in Christ, are forever secure, are forever approved.

DO YOU BELIEVE THE GOSPEL?

I remember this one time we were at a family gathering. My first boy was just a baby, meeting these distant relatives for the first time and he was doing some trick that had everyone thinking he was so cute. Everyone was clapping and cheering him. But he would stop every few seconds, and he’d look back at me, try to find me in the crowd, to see if I was watching. I’d smile, and he’d keep going.

If he'd asked me what I thought at that moment, I would have said: *"I'm so pleased with you. I love you. You are my pride and joy."* Can you imagine then if he were to say: *"Dad, that's great and all, but you know, there's this second cousin over there...I don't think he likes me. He said he was going to take my toy. I'm sorry, I can't go on anymore."* That would have been ridiculous. He has all my love and approval. WHO CARES what the cousin thinks?

And yet, we as children of God run around looking for approval in all these places, while we have all the love we could ever want, from the only One who matters. We are loved beyond imagination. That's direct from God's mouth.

Are you worried? Afraid? Ashamed? Are you looking to things that will NEVER love you like the Father loves you?

Or do you believe the gospel?

If you do, this is how the child of God lives...

C. Application

1. Prays boldly

"Abba! Father!" → That's how Jesus teaches us to start our prayers. We pray at all times as children of God.

My other son, Deacon, when I pick him up from school, he's really dirty. He plays in a sandbox at school for about 30 minutes before I pick him up, and he's covered head to toe in dirt. First thing he likes to do when he gets home? Jump in my bed. I'm very anal about my bed. I used to hate it when people sat on my bed. But Deacon jumps in my bed. I tell him no, and he'll do it again. And I'll act like I'm mad, but he's so cute to me.

That's prayer! We do not tiptoe into the throneroom of God, making sure we say the right things, hoping He's in a good mood. We come in like Deacon! We throw the door open and jump on the bed. We're a mess, but guess what, I can do this because I'm His child. And the Father loves it.

How could we not pray? Let's pray boldly!

2. Trusts radically

In Matthew 6, Jesus' teaching about worry is rooted in the identity we have as children. He says the Father knows what His children need.

You are valuable to Him. He knows exactly where you are and what you need. So do not be anxious. It offends His Fatherhood when we doubt. Trust His love. Give

your worries to Him. Give your future to Him. As you work and study, do it for no one else's approval but His.

3. Obeys freely

v. 17 - *"Provided we suffer"* – this is a call to deny self, carry cross, and follow. But the way a child follows is different than how a slave follows.

- A true child obeys the Father, because he wants to be like the Father. Every child at some point, wants to be like his dad.
- Child also obeys because he wants to see His Father smile. Like my boy, who kept looking back to see if I was watching.

The Father's love not only comforts us, but emboldens us. We step out in faith b/c we're secure. We keep going after failure because we know there's no such thing as failure in Christ. We are never failures. All our failures are nailed to the cross. We are children. Always and only, children.

CONCLUSION

Video of a father at his son's training:

https://www.facebook.com/shaunking/videos/1770950816277162/?hc_ref=ARTYJKjH1SuNlrCzEIsl4M7czBJdsGhCvIh7IV5yuhzYOIffn_CF1rR4f9Vb6XiOLXY

God is not weak like this, but He has this man's heart. Nothing can keep Him from His children.

What kind of Father do you have? What did He give, so that you could call Him Abba, Father?

And this boy in the clip, what do you think he thinks now? All the world must seem right to him now, because he's in his daddy's arms.

Do not be afraid. Do not worry. Do not run after all these other things and make yourself a slave. You are not a slave, you are a child of God.