

## Union With Christ

### *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*

## Our Adoption by the Father

### *Ephesians 1:3 – 6*

#### **Introduction: What Kind of Father is God?**

In March of 1999, Ming and I were engaged and getting premarital counseling. One of the things you're asked when you get premarital counseling is what were your families like. As I've thought about my dad this past week, there are a lot of memories that came to my mind. One of them was when I was just starting to ride a bike without training wheels. I crashed on the street and chipped my front tooth, and my dad came and carried me home. Another memory was listening to him read me bedtime stories. When I was about 8 years old, he read me almost the entire *Lord of the Ring* series by J.R.R. Tolkien. But I have to admit that most of the times I heard his voice, I was very much afraid of him. He was quick tempered, and would raise his voice at my mom over the smallest things. He would yell at me if I didn't get my math tables right. It was really hard for me to go to him for help because he would get upset at me if I didn't get things right the first time. I was even kind of nervous when he'd drive me to elementary school because he'd drill me on those things. One of the ways I've been impacted by him, as we discussed in counseling, is that I'm afraid of being wrong. In fact, at different times in my life, I've been afraid to ask for help. In college, I didn't really go to see T.A.'s. In some ways, my motto was, "I'll do it myself." And when I started working at Intel back in 1994, I didn't ask people for help as much as I needed to. It took me a while before I realized, "I really should ask more people what I should be doing!"

There are many ways in which our parents help define our identities: who we are, how we do things. As I've seen how many father in particular has contributed to me, there are times when I've been grateful, but there have been times where it's been painful. My dad had an explosive temper, he drank a lot and he spent a lot of money on alcohol and alcohol related things. He eventually divorced my mom, and looking back at his life has made me ask the question, "Who am I to be getting married? I come from a broken home! What am I carrying into this marriage? Who am I period???" As I asked some of those questions, I got pretty emotional, because I felt a sense of loss.

I wonder if there are some of you who relate to that. Maybe you don't. Maybe you had great parents, a great father in particular, who gave you a great sense of your own identity. But maybe not. Maybe you do relate to some degree. And maybe you've wondered, "What kind of Father is God?"

#### **Context:**

Let's look into Ephesians 1:3-6. We are studying the first part of a poem concerning how God loves us. The poem is in the form of a Hebrew inverted parallel, or *chiasm*, which means that the first line matches with the last line, the second line matches with the second to the last line, and so on until you reach the middle. The middle point is the main point.

#### **Poetic Outline of 1:3-14**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ  
    who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ  
    4 just as He chose us in him before the foundation of the world  
        that we should be holy and blameless before Him  
        in love 5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself  
        according to the kind intention of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of  
        His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved,  
        7 in him we have redemption through his blood,  
        the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of  
        His grace 8 which He lavished upon us in all wisdom and insight  
    9 He made known to us the mystery of His will according to the kind intention which He  
    purposed in him 10 with a view to an administration [a household] suitable to the fulness of  
    the times, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the  
    earth

in him 11 also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,  
 12 to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory  
 13 in him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, 14 who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession  
 to the praise of His glory

**Poetic Summary**

Blessed be God

We have every spiritual blessing

He chose us

That we would be holy and blameless

He predestined us to adoption

According to the kind intention of His will

Grace freely bestowed

The Cross: Redemption by his blood

The Cross: Forgiveness of our trespasses

Grace lavished upon us

According to the kind intention of His will

He predestined us to an inheritance

That we would be to the praise of His glory

We believed

We have the Holy Spirit

Praise be to God

Notice this poetic form helps us to balance the two themes of God's predestination of us, and our choice to believe; they appear at the third-most lines in the poem, balancing each other. We're going to study the top most part of the poem, a section about the love of God the Father. The second is about the love of God the Son. And the third is about the love of God the Spirit. This is one of the most beautiful poems ever written. Certainly it contains precious truth about God, and about our identity in God alone. Today we're going to focus in on God the Father.

**He Loves Us Generously: v.3**

Paul begins with a very happy pronouncement of blessing piling up on blessing: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ." We bless God because He blessed us. One of the clearest patterns in the way God deals with human beings is not to load them up with commands, nor to make them feel guilty, but to BLESS them.

In the original creation, God took the first humanity aside and the first thing He did was bless them. Then he commanded them to be fruitful and multiply and rule upon the earth. From this, we get a clear sense that to be blessed is to be empowered. It's to be filled up with the strength you need to be what God intends. Now in Jesus Christ, God is calling forth a new creation, and He is creating a new humanity. That new humanity is blessed "in Christ" because Jesus Christ is the beginning of a new humanity where God and humanity are reunited again. That is what it means to be "in Christ." And the first thing that we discover about ourselves in Christ is that we are blessed—empowered with the certainty and strength that comes from being reunited with God. This gives us some insight as to how God relates as a Father to us. He begins with a tremendous statement of empowerment and privilege to us who are in Christ. He takes care to apply His blessing upon those He loves.

**The Key Metaphor--Adoption: v.5**

How can we best understand this? How can we put the love of God into words? Perhaps it's by thinking of God as Paul does: as an adopting Father. In v.5, Paul says that "in love, He predestined us to adoption as sons." I'm going to jump down there because adoption is the dominant metaphor stringing this whole section together. Right away, I want to address the concern some of you women might have. Why is this "sons" and not "sons and daughters" or at least "children?" Is Paul sexist? The answer is no. The reason why Paul uses the term "sons" here and not "daughters" is because he is working with both Roman and Jewish cultural contexts.

So let's understand that background. Roman adoption was not done for children, like we do in our day and age. It was done for an adult son to name an heir to a house. The adopting father would go through three main steps.

[To quote extensively (!) from Barclay, for the purpose of these written notes:

“Roman adoption was always rendered more serious and more difficult by the Romans ‘patria potestas.’ The ‘patria potestas’ was the father’s absolute control over his family; that power was absolute; it was actually the power of life and death...No matter how old he was, he was still under the ‘patria potestas,’ in the absolute possession, and under the absolute control, of his father. Obviously this made adoption into another family a very difficult and a very serious step. In adoption a person had to pass from one ‘patria potestas’ to another. He had to pass out of the possession and control of one father into the equally absolute possession and control of another. There were two steps. The first was known as ‘mancipatio,’ and it was carried out by a symbolic sale, in which copper and scales were used. Three times the symbolism of sale was carried out. Twice the father symbolically sold his son, and twice he bought him back; and the third time he did not buy him back, and thus the ‘patria potestas’ was held to be broken. After the sale there followed a ceremony called ‘vindicatio.’ The adopting father went to the ‘praetor,’ one of the Romans magistrates, and presented a legal case for the transference of the person to be adopted into his ‘patria potestas.’ When all this was completed the adoption was complete. Clearly this was a serious and impressive step.”

“But it is the consequences of adoption which are the most significant for the picture that is in Paul’s mind. There were four main consequences. (i) The adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family. (ii) It followed that he became heir to his new father’s estate. Even if other sons were afterwards born, who were real blood relations, it did not affect his rights. He was inalienably co-heir with them. (iii) In law, the old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out. For instance, legally all debts were cancelled; they were wiped out as if they had never been. The adopted person was regarded as a new person entering into a new life with which the past had nothing to do. (iv) In the eyes of the law the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father.”

“Roman history provides an outstanding case of how literally and completely this was held to be true. [In the year 50 AD] The Emperor Claudius adopted Nero, in order that Nero might succeed him on the throne. There not in any sense blood relations. Claudius already had a daughter, Octavia. To cement the alliance, Nero wished to marry Octavia. Now, Nero and Octavia were in no sense connected; they were in no sense blood relations; yet in the eyes of the law, they were brother and sister; and before they could marry the Roman senate had to pass special legislation to enable Nero to marry a girl who was legally his own sister. Nothing shows better how complete adoption in Rome was.” (Commentary on Romans, pg.110,111)]

Distilling all Barclay’s research on adoption leads me to the following. “In Roman society, the father had ultimate authority in his household. This was called the ‘patria potestas,’ the absolute ownership of the father. Adoption in Roman society was incredibly serious, then, because the son had to pass out of the patria potestas of the natural father, and into the patria potestas of the adopting father. There were three steps to this. The first was known as ‘mancipatio,’ which is where we get our word “emancipate.” The adopting father approaches the natural father with seven witnesses. He brings a scale and copper weights and purchases the son from the old family with a ceremony. Twice the adopting father bought the son, and twice the natural father bought him back. Then on the third time, the natural father does not buy him back. Thus the ‘patria potestas’ of the natural father was held to be broken. After the sale there followed a ceremony called ‘vindicatio.’ The adopting father went to the ‘praetor,’ one of the Romans magistrates, and publically argued his case for the adoption of this son. He said, “I to name this young man as my heir because...” Then, third is the party, during which the adopting father publically announces to all his friends and family that there is a new son and a new heir.

Roman history itself provides an outstanding case of this adoption. In the year 50 AD, the Emperor Claudius adopted a young man so that this young man would succeed him on the throne. That young man changed his name to Nero. In order to cement the alliance, Nero wanted to marry the natural daughter of Claudius, Octavia, who was already his legal sister. They were in no sense blood relations; yet in the eyes of the law, they were brother and sister, and they couldn’t get married. Nero had to get the Roman senate to pass special legislation to enable him to marry a girl who was legally his own sister. That is how serious and life-changing this adoption was.

If you’re curious about how this looked, I encourage you to watch the movie Ben Hur. Charlton Heston plays Judah Ben Hur, the young Jewish galley slave who rescues the Roman Admiral Arius from drowning during a naval battle on the Mediterranean. The Romans won the battle, so Arius returns to Rome a hero.

During his victory march through Rome to the throne of the Emperor Tiberias, Arius has Judah Ben Hur ride beside him on the victory chariot. Then, Arius appears before the entire Roman senate and the Emperor to plead the case that Ben Hur be released from being a slave and placed by adoption as an adult son into Arius' family. The Emperor and the Senate acquiesce and next comes to huge gala celebration thrown by Arius. Into the main hall and courtyard in Arius' enormous house come dancers, musicians, and guests: Arius' friends and colleagues. In the middle of the party, Arius commands that the music stop, and he calls Judah Ben Hur forward. He tells the whole audience of his great joy at finding such a young man who rescued him at sea and then won the Roman chariot races in the Circus of Rome. He then tells the audience his reason for throwing this huge celebration in the first place: to recognize, honor, and publically state his love for his adopted son, Young Arius. Ben Hur, or Young Arius, steps forward, and Arius puts his ancient family signet ring on his finger. From that moment onward, all of the father's wealth, land, power, and honor belong to and will be inherited by Young Arius. Young Arius is publicly identified with his father by a powerful public statement of love.

Now how do we apply this to ourselves today? First of all, by remembering again that this picture is not for men only. The *cultural* picture was of the adoption of adult sons. Paul is therefore saying that God adopts men and women in a way similar to how a Roman father adopts a son to be his heir. Young men, you are adopted as a son into God's family like a Roman father adopts an adult son. Young women, you are adopted as a daughter into God's family like a Roman father adopts an adult son. So regardless of your gender or your age, this picture of Roman adoption applies to you if you have faith in Christ.

Next, we can list the important points that apply to us:

1. The father does everything in public. He publicly purchases the adult son, publicly argues for the adoption before a judge or a magistrate, and publicly presents the new son as a full-fledged adult member of the family. The PUBLIC nature of this commitment is highly significant. This father WANTS this son!
2. The father purchases the son out of the previous family, making a permanent and irrevocable legal break with the old family.
3. The old life was totally cancelled out. If you had debts to pay, they were cancelled out. A new identity was assumed. This is truly newness of life.
4. The adopted son was accepted as a full-fledged heir, guaranteed regardless of blood line or whether there were any other sons.
5. The new son was a son permanently, totally, and eternally. There was no way to break the tie between the adopting father and the new son, except possibly through another adoption agreed to by the new father, which is ridiculous to imagine!
6. The new son will assume the responsibilities of his new position in his new family, as befits his station and his honored sonship.

Let's dwell a bit on how PUBLIC this declaration of ADOPTION LOVE is. The father initiates the public break with the old family. Then he publicly states his case in front of all concerned parties and authorities. And he then publicly declares his love and blessing at a huge party thrown for the express purpose of recognizing this new heir. How powerful this PUBLIC affirmation by our father can be! I know this because once my family and another family went to Lake Tahoe together to ski. We stayed at a cabin in the mountains. Now my sister was in second grade at the time, and this other family also had a daughter the same age. This other father let his daughter play on his lap, but my sister never had that kind of relationship with our father. Watching this public display of affection and love made an impact on my sister. Later that night, she came to our mom and asked, "How come I can't play on Dad's lap like that?"

This yearning for a public declaration of love from our father is so big that Gary Smalley and John Trent, wrote the popular book *The Blessing*, about this subject. This is what they say about our desire for public, unconditional acceptance by our parents: "All of us long to be accepted by others. While we may say out loud, 'I don't care what other people think about me,' on the inside we all yearn for intimacy and affection.

This yearning is especially true in our relationship with our parents. Gaining or missing out on parental approval has a tremendous impact on us, even if it has been years since we had any regular contact with them. In fact, what happens in our relationship with our parents can greatly affect all our present and future relationships.” How meaningful a blessing, a statement of public love is! This resonates beautifully with the picture of adoption Paul uses here because this is how God loves you.

### **Father Wounds**

So perhaps some of you long for that kind of love, because maybe the dominant feelings you feel about your father are neglect. Maybe you feel abandoned. So many of us are still longing for that kind of blessing from our earthly father. Maybe you don’t even know your father and wonder how your life would be had he been there. Or maybe you wish your father were different. Or maybe you’ve been a really driven person for most of your life because your father held out the carrot of blessing but never really gave it to you. Or maybe you’ve let that deep ache in your soul for your father’s blessing turn into a rage against him, and now all you feel is a throbbing hatred.

Reba McEntire sang a song that captures some of these feelings. It’s in her song called “The Greatest Man I Never Knew.”

The greatest man I never knew  
Lived just down the hall  
And every day we’d say hello  
But never touched at all  
He was in his paper  
I was in my room  
How was I to know he thought I hung the moon?

The greatest man I never knew  
Came home late every night  
He never had too much to say  
Too much was on his mind  
I never really knew him  
And now it seems so sad  
Everything he gave to us took all he had

Then the days turned into years  
And the memories to black and white  
He grew cold like an old winter wind  
Blowing across my life

The greatest words I never heard  
I guess I’ll never hear  
The man I thought could never die  
‘S been dead almost a year  
Oh, he was good at business  
But there was business left to do  
He never said he loved me  
Guess he thought I knew

If you have anger in your heart because you don’t feel like you’ve been blessed by your earthly father, the news for us is that only God blesses us in this way. We must not look ultimately to our earthly fathers. They couldn’t give this blessing to us. They were only human, and they couldn’t give what only God Himself can give.

Now what does that mean? The inward blessings we desire are the heavenly blessings God gives us. God gives us the blessing of empowerment, the blessing of love, the blessing of status as a son or daughter in His royal family, the blessing of forgiveness (v.7-8), the blessing of being a part of His everlasting work (v.9-10), by implication the blessing of true significance, the blessing of a family inheritance (v.11-14), the blessing of inward riches, and the blessing of the power to change. It’s a blessing just to bear His name and be a part of His family. What kind of Father can bless like this?

Clearly, God is a Father whose ADOPTING LOVE EXUBERANTLY BRINGS US INTO HIS FAMILY. He publicly initiated a relationship with us at the Cross, for that was His public demonstration of love. That is where He bought us publicly. And then He publicly declares us to be a part of His family by proclaiming that He gives His Spirit to us. The indwelling Spirit is like the ancestral signet ring that we can bear proudly, because the Spirit is God's great signature on our hearts guaranteeing us our rights and inheritance in God's royal family.

#### **He Loves Us Intentionally: v.4a**

But is God's blessing on us just a fortuitous chance-happening? Did we just happen to get lucky? Not at all. In v.4, (jumping back there) Paul says that God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world. God's blessing is no accident. He has always intended to bless us. It was His choice. And he chose first. That struck me, because when I play "father" with some of the kids next-door, the initiative doesn't belong to me. Sometimes when kids come over to my apartment and ask if they could hang out with me, I say, "Well, okay." And I let them in. But my choice didn't come first; I decide after the kids ask. And sometimes I'm too tired to hang out with them!

But with God, the initiative is entirely His. He chose us before the foundation of the world was laid. Before God threw time, energy and matter into motion, God chose you in Jesus. In some mysterious way that I don't completely understand, God exercised some foreknowledge and choice. Now this truth is also counterbalanced by v.13, where Paul says that we also believed in the gospel of Christ. So we have a choice to make also. I'm not sure how this works, nor am I sure how to explain this in terms that would be acceptable in our current Hegelian either-or framework. But I know that God chose us. This is clearly the emphasis in this section because Paul mentions God's choice twice. He "chose us" and He "predestined us to adoption." There was no passivity on His part. He fully intended to bring us into His family.

Illus: A woman wrote a letter to a man I know about how this affected her. She said:

Hi Ron,

One thing you can know about me from the get go is that writing about myself is a hard task. My growing up years were painful, and I tried to put them behind me for good—with no looking back. God had other plans for me however. God has indeed given me a great future and hope, but also has been working in my life to get me to trust Him with my past as well.

I grew up in Menlo Park, and was raised by my mother. Single parent households were very rare then, and employers were not very supportive, so my mother worked very hard to make a meager living. I was on my own a lot as a child, and in order to meet my need for a family I adopted my friends' families as my own. This helped me meet some of my need for family, but I always felt on the outside as well. I never was able to meet my father. My mother told me about him (none of it true), but there was so much anger and secrecy surrounding their story together that my inquiries were quickly squelched. I had an incredible experience with the mercy of God when I was preparing a teaching, as my homework for [a] New Testament Exegesis class. I had come to the verse which reads, "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him in love." It was right at this point when my cousin called me and said she had run across letters in my grandmother's home (she had just died) that told that I was illegitimate, and that the name my mother had written on my birth certificate was not my father's name at all. So I had grown up as Judy Donnelly, but a Donnelly I never was. Just when I could have felt unplanned, unwanted, etc. God writes, "I planned you before the foundation of the world!" I cannot believe how gracious God was to me in this. ...

Judy Donnelly

For many of us, that would be the last straw that shakes our world to the core, but Judy Donnelly understood her identity. Her identity was in God. He had chosen her. He had wanted her. He had drawn her to Him. He is not an impersonal Father that just stands there solemnly looking at us while we muster up the courage to finally approach him. No way! He was loving from the beginning!

Illus: I once had a wonderful opportunity to point out this truth. I was standing on the second story walkway outside my apartment. Standing beside me was my precious 11 year old neighbor, Nora

Gonzalez. It was 10pm, and we were talking about her day because she was at an age now where she likes talking more than coloring. Now when I moved in to my apartment in East Palo Alto 2 years previous, Nora was 9, and she then showed me a picture of Jesus, and said, "That's my God." I was touched, so ever since then, I've tried to tell her stories to help her understand Jesus better. On this particular night just a few days ago, I had an idea. I grabbed my telescope, but then realized that the lens had been broken by another kid. So I dropped the telescope and said, "Let's stand outside, Nora. I'll tell you a story about the stars. A long time ago, a man named Abraham wondered if God loved him and would keep His promises to him. So God promised Abraham, 'I love you so much, I'll make everyone who has faith your family; and your family as big as the number of stars out there.'" Then I said, "Nora, that means God made a star just for you, because you have faith in Jesus. And you know which star He made? I think it's that one! Because that star is the most beautiful." I pointed to the brightest star, the north star that hung low in the warm summer night sky. And she SMILED. Now I am delighted with this little girl. But it's only a drop in the ocean compared to how delighted God is with her, and how He had set His loving eye on her before time began. The same is true for each one of you who is in Christ. He loves who you are, He knew you individually and uniquely from the beginning, and He prepared a star to shine in the night sky just for you.

Do you know why this is so important for us? Because sometimes we think that God the Father is the angry and terrifying, and Jesus Christ the Son of God is loving and gentle. For some time, I thought of God the Father as a cold Judge. We don't realize that God the Father is the initiator of love. He loved us first. It was in His heart to love us like children, so He is the one who sent Jesus to fetch us. That's why as Jesus walked on the earth, and as he gathered many people to himself, he said in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me shall come to me." Jesus' own understanding of his Father was that the Father loves whom He chooses. And the Father sent Jesus to claim them. That is why Paul begins this magnificent poetic letter with a reflection on the Father's love. His love began the whole thing.

#### **He Loves Us Purposefully: v.4b**

Third, God loves us purposefully. Why did he choose us? For what purpose? To heal us. Or as Paul says in v.4, "that we should be holy and blameless before Him." Many of us in this generation tend to look at the word "holy" with a some suspicion because we sense restrictions and boundaries. We also tend to look at the word "blameless" with disbelief. Yet to be holy means to find God's purpose in your life. For example, items in the Jewish temple were considered holy because they had a special and proper purpose. Whether you've recognized it or not, many of you have been on a quest to be holy. That is, you want to know what your special and proper purpose in life is. That does mean some priorities and boundaries, but you can't have purpose without priorities and boundaries. To be blameless before Him means that your entire past, which was characterized by self-centeredness, is wiped clean. That guilt is gone.

This is even more important in the Jewish understanding of adoption. Although Paul minors in the Roman context of adoption, he majors in the Jewish context. Adoption is a way of saying that God has made us His special people. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, He 'adopted' Israel as 'His son' (see especially Rom.9:4 but also Ex.4:22, Dt.32:10, Hos.11:1). He lavished on them an inheritance, new life in a promised land that was the closest thing on earth to paradise. Now the same applications are still true: He loved them publicly (He redeemed them before all the nations), He loved them intentionally (He was the one who initiated with them), and He loved them purposefully (He had a mind-boggling plan for them). What is awesome about the Jewish understanding of adoption over and above the Roman understanding is that we are made holy and blameless. We are being brought into God's royal family. Now God has brought us out of sin like he brought Israel out of Egypt, lavishing on us an inheritance, new life in the promised Spirit.

Francis Hodgson Burnett gives us a great picture of this in *A Little Princess*, where little Sara Crewe gets locked in the boarding school attic by the despicable Miss Minchin. What sustains Sara is the affirmation of her father, that she is a princess. When Sara is finally released from the attic and taken by Sara's rightful guardian, Miss Minchin sneers, "I suppose that you feel now that you are a princess again." Sara responds, "I tried not to be anything else, even when I was coldest and hungriest, I tried not to be." And the timid Miss Amelia, having seen Sara's conduct, vindicates Sara in Miss Minchin's face: "I must say I've often thought it would have been better if you had been less severe on Sara Crewe and had seen that she was decently dressed and more comfortable. I know she was worked too hard for a child of her age, and I know she was only half fed...She saw through us both. She saw that you were a hard-hearted, worldly woman

and that I was a weak fool, and that we were both of us vulgar and mean enough to grovel on our knees before her money, and behave ill to her because it was taken from her – though she behaved herself like a little princess even when she was a beggar. She did – she did – like a little princess!” (p.341-2)

And C. S. Lewis put it this way. In the fifth book of the Narnia series, *The Horse and His Boy*, Shasta rises from obscurity as a peasant to crown prince of the land. He discovers his true identity as Prince Cor. Here is what his father the King says to him about being royalty: “For this is what it means...to be first in every desperate attack and last in every desperate retreat, and when there’s hunger in the land, to wear finer clothes and laugh louder over a scantier meal than [everyone else].” (p.215)

Because God has adopted you, you have taken on a new identity. God wants us to proudly carry the character of His house, His royal family.

### **Through Jesus Christ: v.5 – 6**

But how does God do this? It’s “through Jesus Christ to Himself.” It sounds strange that an adoption would happen through Jesus Christ, doesn’t it? Usually we say an adopted child is adopted through an agency or a bureau. This makes it sound like Jesus is an agency. Now in a sense, that is exactly what Jesus is. He is an adoption agent. He’s the one who makes our adoption possible.

But let’s think about this some more. In our case, Jesus relates to God as his father. Paul said so in v.3, that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And Jesus as God has always had this perfect relationship with God such that he called God his Father and he called himself the Son. It’s not that Jesus was inferior to God, or that Jesus was less than God, or that Jesus was literally a child of God. The Father-Son language is a metaphor for understanding the affection and love between Jesus and Yahweh. Jesus has an intimacy with God and a voluntary servant attitude towards Him. So when God looks at Jesus, He says, “My Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And when Jesus looks at God, he says, “My Father, who I love and by whom I am loved.”

Now when we come to Jesus Christ, we step into that relationship which Jesus has with his Father. We are in Jesus, and we relate to God through Jesus. God relates to us through Jesus. That’s why the phrase “in Christ” in the book of Ephesians is so important. The phrase “in him” or “in Christ” or “in the Beloved” occurs 12 times (v.1,3,4,5,6,7,9,10,10,12,13,13) in the first 14 verses alone! To the faithful in Christ Jesus. God has blessed you in Christ. He chose you in Christ. He adopted you through Jesus Christ. Everything happens to us in Christ. In Christ, God says to us, “My son, My daughter, in whom I am well pleased.”

What motivates God to choose us like this? It’s His kindness. Paul says in v.6, “according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” God’s kindness is shown in His free choice of who will be His children, regardless of their many faults, regardless of their many foibles, as He adopts them through Jesus Christ to stand before Him as His very own heirs. So, to close: May we know God as our Heavenly Father, as intimately as Paul shares with us here!