**Adoption of sons**

Last Sunday, we addressed an aspect of our unfathomable riches that we titled ‘Related to God through propitiation’. Propitiation, we said, was the satisfaction of God’s character by Christ’s death on the cross. Because God’s character was satisfied by Christ’s death on the cross, we are related to God through that propitiation – the satisfaction of God’s character. The ways in which the New Testament epistles say that we are related to God through propitiation will be taught according to this schedule:

May No Subject

6 16 Related to God through propitiation

13 17 Adoption of sons

20 18 Children of God, Sons of God

27 19 Brethren

The passages on adoption of sons [***houthesia***] relevant to the church, the body of Christ, are:

Romans 8:15

For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of ***adoption as sons*** by which we cry out, " Abba! Father!" [Compare to Galatians 4:5,6 below.]

Romans 8:23

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our ***adoption as sons***, the redemption [***apolutrosis***] of our body. [Compare to Romans 3:24.]

Galatians 4:1-7

Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem [***exagorazo***] those who were under the Law, that we might receive the ***adoption as sons***. 6 Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, " Abba! Father!" 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God. [see all three persons of the Trinity in verse 6!]

Ephesians 1:5

…He [the Father] predestined us to ***adoption as sons*** through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His [the Father’s] will…

**Which adoption of sons is Paul writing about?**

On the one hand, adoption in the Roman Empire was very, very complex, and it varied between the different cultures and levels of society. But we have some strong clues in the New Testament and in New Testament history that will help us understand what Paul was writing about:

1. The churches in Rome, Galatia, and Ephesus each had substantial Roman legal and cultural connections. Rome, was, of course, the capital of the empire. Galatia had among its major cities two Roman colonies. And Ephesus was the capital of the Roman province, with a Roman governor and about 3,000 Roman soldiers. So the Roman adoption of sons process was in view.
2. The Roman Empire’s first five emperors – the Julio-Claudian dynasty - had all become emperors by the adoption of sons process: **Augustus**, **Tiberius**, **Caligula**, **Claudius, and Nero.** This provided a large scale illustration for Paul’s reading audience at Rome, Galatia and Ephesus.

Adoption of sons was done, then, to provide an heir to the throne of the empire. The adoption of the new heir to the throne was approved by the Roman senate, and the adoption was publicly conducted in front of seven official witnesses. Adoption of sons had this set of outcomes in the Roman Empire:

* The adopted son lost all rights in his old family & gained more rights than a fully legitimate son, in his new family. The protections of an adopted son were vastly superior to that of a natural born son!
* He became an heir to his new father's estate, even if other sons were born afterwards.
* The old life of the adopted son was completely wiped out, so that the adopted son was regarded as a new person entering into a new life. Any prior family connections, past criminal history and/or debts were eliminated entirely.
* The adopted son was literally & absolutely the son of his new father.

The adopted son was made ready to rule and to reign! Being forgiven, and redeemed, and therefore being declared righteous, adoption of sons included all of these, only to prepare one to rule and reign unrestrained by any past connections, errors, failures or indebtedness.