

Rich Spiritual Blessings

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[0 : 00] We had quite a crowd last Monday.

That's heart medicine to a teacher. If any of you were not here last time,! this may come as a shock. We have moved on from the topic of justification by faith.

We left it behind. I informed the group of that last time, but I added a qualifier, and that is, you never stray too far from justification.

It touches everything. Everything in the salvation process. So we're going to be hearing that word until the conclusion of our study in May.

Probably here next September, and I don't even know what we're going to teach on. I want us to mentally meditate, though, on the rich spiritual blessings we receive as children of God through faith in Christ, having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

[1 : 16] Now, the Apostle Paul was no stranger to these abundant blessings, having been delivered from what used to be his principal task of rounding up and killing Christians when he was named Saul of Tarsus.

Here's what he had to say in the book of Ephesians, chapter 1, verse 3, 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.

Marvelous passage of Scripture. And by the way, that sentence continues on to verse 14. It's the longest sentence in the Bible. It's a wonderful, wonderful section of Scripture, obviously.

Well, three blessings that come to mind are the fact that God the Father chose us, God the Son redeemed us, and God the Spirit regenerated us.

Now, for that to happen, the Lord gave us spiritual eyes to see both the glory of Christ and our utter ruin of sin.

[2 : 49] As a result of the new birth, we experience conversion, to do that, we repented of our sins, and even repentance is described in the Bible as a grace gift from God.

Through faith, another grace gift of God, we were and are intimately united to Christ Jesus. Well, how intimate is it?

All that is His becomes ours. It is so intimate that the Father treats us not only just as if we'd never sin, He treats us as sons.

He treats us like we are His Son, Jesus. Further, we are justified, there's that word, forgiven of all our sins, past, present, and future, and we escape the eternal punishment we all richly deserve.

If you ever want to read anything on that, I read it today. Jonathan Edwards, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. You can read it in one setting. We are credited with the full righteousness of Christ Himself.

[4 : 08] Himself. Dwell on that in your meditations this week. The righteousness of Christ in fullness. That means, among other things, we can boldly or with confidence enter into the very presence of God and stand before Him without fear of retribution or condemnation.

Most people can't even do that with an earthly king. And we can do it with a heavenly, eternal king. And Paul reminds us in Romans 8.1, There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Amazing passage of Scripture. So that begs the question, how much condemnation does God have reserved for all of us who truly believe and have been born from God?

And the answer to that, of course, is none. None. No condemnation. That leads to another question. With all of this as our present and eternal possession, how can we improve on this?

Where do we go from here? We just did justification by faith. We spent weeks and weeks there.

How can we improve on this? Can we improve on it? Is there more we can receive from the mighty

hands of the triune God?

[5 : 40] Well, it turns out there is. There is. The perfect and inerrant word of the living God speaks of another blessing which is ours.

In addition to regeneration, conversion, justification, we receive an almost unimaginable gift of adoption.

And that's where we find ourselves tonight. The Father adopts believers as His own children. That's amazing, guys.

Every believer in this room has been adopted by God the Father. Dr. MacArthur has published around 150 books in his lifetime.

I quickly counted those that I have in my personal library. I have 125 of those, 150. I don't know where the others are.

[6 : 42] How long would you stand? I have several favorites but at or near the top was a book he wrote in 2010 called *Slave, The Hidden Truth About Your Identity in Christ*.

It's an amazing book. I couldn't hardly put it down. The background of adoption from the human perspective comes from the Roman practice of adoption.

Paul would have been very learned that. He was a Roman citizen. He would have understood that. Well, in his book *Slave*, Dr. MacArthur explains this background expertly in a chapter appropriately named from slaves to sons.

That's what we're talking about. The premise of the book is this. When we read the New Testament the word servant or bond servant is the Greek word *doulos*.

That is the word slave. It's the word slave. And most likely your translations and mine, they don't say that. It is Dr.

[7 : 58] MacArthur's position that Bible translators over the centuries have, and this is his words, lied to us about that term. He says we've been lied to.

They wanted and did soften the word. They did it for people like King James and others. They were fearful that it might be offensive.

I should add this point as a qualifier. When you think of slave or slavery in the Bible, divorce your mind from the American concept which existed in the South in the 19th century before it was defeated by the American Civil War.

That is not the slavery that the Bible speaks of. The American experience was a great evil and could only be cured by the effusion of blood which John Brown said as he was walking up the gallows.

Slavery is not our focus on this section of the study. And by the way, if you want to read a Bible that has that word, any time servant or bond servant you're a slave, that's the home in addition.

[9 : 13] And I have that at home. But that's not the focus of our study. Rather, we're going to hear comments from Dr. MacArthur on the Roman system of adoption, the adoption, adopting a slave as your child which was allowed under Roman law.

Listen to Dr. MacArthur. The very term adoption is filled with ideas of compassion, kindness, grace, and love.

But to understand the nuances of the New Testament metaphor, it is helpful to turn our attention to ancient Rome. Though the formal adoption of slaves was somewhat uncommon, it was permissible under Roman law and it did occur under certain instances.

The extraordinary nature of the practice makes God's adoptive love toward us all the more remarkable in that he has done the unexpected by adopting all his slaves.

This is what God has done. He adopted all his slaves as his own children and named those children as heirs, co-heirs with Christ.

[10 : 40] In addition, in ancient Rome, the act of adoption, these are MacArthur's words, immediately granted the former slave his freedom, permanently placing him into the family of his master.

So also, as the adopted children of God, we have been set free from slavery to sin. Moreover, we can rest assured in knowing that we have been given a permanent place in the family of God.

You don't lose that, guys. Let the other denominations wrestle with that. You don't lose that.

Adoption in Roman times signified a new beginning, entrance into a new family, such that all previous family ties and obligations were broken.

Once the adoption was completed, the new son or daughter was then completely under both the care and control of their new father.

Amazing concept. That closes out Dr. MacArthur's words. And we could go on. He had a lot more quotes, but we get the idea. In our adoption, we too have a new father.

[12:00] And guess what? He is a perfect father. I never was one. I tried a little. I didn't try hard enough.

I'd love to turn that clock back with what I know now, but I can't. Our new father is God himself and he now treats us just as he treats his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, some people have tried to equate adoption as found in the New Testament as merely an aspect of justification and not a distinct blessing.

But the truth is, it is distinct and it carries with it its own set of privileges. The fact is, adoption is not the same as regeneration or justification, which we've already studied.

It's not the same as the other blessings associated with salvation God's way, which is the very topic we've been studying now for a year and a half. Justification, as we learned, means our acceptance with God as righteous.

[13:17] He declares us to be righteous and because his declared righteousness, God is then able to grant us eternal life with him.

No sinner can dwell in the presence of God because he is absent absolutely holy. Absolutely holy. But once those sins are dealt with in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, we can come into God's presence.

Just a little aside on that thought of holiness. I'm studying holiness right now, anticipating we might look at some of that next fall. I think what I've got so far is about 11 lessons, so I'll forewarn you now.

In adoption, we become sons of God and we are given titanic privileges reserved for the children of God.

There is a very special passage in God's words which expresses this fact, John 1, 12, but as many as received him to them he gave the right and that means authority, the right or authority to become children of God to those who believe on his name.

[14:38] That word belief I've told you is commit, trust, there's a whole bunch of different ways to describe that. We become children of God when we have conferred upon us the authority that is given to those who believe, that's have faith, on Jesus' name.

Believing on Jesus' name again is a level of trust and commitment of one's life to him. Now there's some other things we need to say concerning the relation of adoption to the other acts of grace in the salvation process.

And by that I mean those things contained in the Ordo Salutis, Latin for order of salvation. And there are a few in here that have joined us sort of midstream and that's where we began our study back in the fall of 2018.

It's been a while since we reviewed the order of salvation so I'm going to do that again this evening. We started out with the decrees of God and then we went to foreknowledge, predestination, election, God's choice of some to salvation.

Then we followed that with the effectual call and regeneration, that's the new birth. Then we talked about conversion, that involved repentance and faith.

[16:07] We talked about union with Christ. From there we went to justification, a declaration of right standing before God which we just finished up last week.

Now we've moved into adoption which means being placed into the family of God. We will go from there to sanctification, progressive growth in holiness.

I'm reading through Leviticus right now, I'm reading through the Bible, which sounds what a powerful guy, first time I've ever done it. Never have read through the Bible.

But I made it to Leviticus from sanctification, we're going to talk about perseverance, remaining in Christ, and glorification, receiving a resurrection body in heaven.

Now there was a time when every person in this room was under bondage. Every one of us. We were under bondage to sin and Satan.

[17:12] That's true of every human, except for Jesus and he was the God-man. He was very unique, of course. That was birthed, by the way, in Genesis 3 in the Garden of Eden. In those days, we were spiritual orphans under a cruel oppression of the evil one.

This oppression was introduced in the Garden of Eden by the disobedience of our original parents and has touched all of humanity. Now I know there's a lot of you in here that were saved as kids. And that's wonderful. You may not have felt the impact of that as a child. Well, I got saved at 30 and I definitely felt the impact. I've repented of a lot of sins I committed in that 18 to 30 range.

And I know God's forgiven because I've repented 800 times. Surely in one of those, you know, it took root. By nature, we were children of wrath.

Ephesians 2.3 We were sons of disobedience. Ephesians 2.2 and 5.6 We were children of the devil himself.

[18:25] John 8.44 At one time, we lived in the shadow of God's terrifying judgment and confinement in hell.

Hebrews 10.27 Well, it's not a pretty picture, is it? The fallen man comes up with answers to that. Hundreds of answers trying to address that question.

What changed? And, you know, we come up with all kinds of weird stuff. But there's only one true answer. Only one. Going to be easy to memorize.

God intervened. There's no other explanation. God intervened. God was eager to display the glory of His eternal grace.

so He intervened in our lives. Paul tells us that in Ephesians and in Galatians. Listen to Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4 to 6.

[19:32] I don't know why I put this first, but I did. In love He predestined us, that's God, in love He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will to the praise of His glorious grace which He has blessed us in, with which He has blessed us in the beloved.

By the way, that's a continuation of that verse 3 that I read at the start. And still we're not through that complete sentence. Galatians 4, 4 to 5, but when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son.

Born of a woman, born under the law, we know Jesus was Jewish, to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Adoption's an important theme here. The Lord Jesus Christ left an eternal throne throne. He existed on in the presence of God the Father for eternity past.

He came to this earth and in the Greek language pitched His tent with us. He tabernacled with us.

The Lord traversed that great distance between heaven and earth and united the nature of God and the nature of man in His own person.

[21:11] That's why He's the God-man. And you know, that's unique. There's no one else that's a God-man. And may I say this and I do this with, you know, it's a fact but I don't want to hit it too hard.

The Father's not the God-man. The Holy Spirit's not. Only Christ. The unique God-man took upon Himself humanity. And He was forsaken by the Father that we might be welcomed one day by the Father as sons.

As sons. He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. He pulled out all of the stops to make us a part of God's family.

Meditate on that this week. He didn't leave anything unturned, no stone unturned here, to make us part of the family of God. As was God's plan from eternity past, the Son purchased believers on Calvary's cruel hill.

We were purchased because of the cross. And we were thus granted by the cross, by the shed blood on the cross.

[22:40] The blessing of adoption. Paul says it really well in Galatians 3.26, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.

In Christ we are all sons of God. Those who believe, those who've been regenerated, justified, and this agrees perfectly with the words of John and his gospel that we've already read, but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.

A right to become his child. That's adoption. Can we really grasp what happens in adoption? God makes a judicial declaration placing regenerated and justified sinners into his family.

We become the sons and daughters of God. And once that happens, we enjoy all the rights and all the privileges of one who is a member of God's eternal family.

Remember Rome, you become a member of that family. Well, on a higher plane, we become a member of God's family. And we have certain rights and privileges.

[24 : 11] Access is a big one. Boldly, with confidence. I tell people that when you wake up at three in the morning and the world's crashing in on you, God's got very big ears.

He can hear the slightest prayer that's whispered in the dark. Now, the truth concerning adoption is an important term in God's salvation plants.

And too many people over the centuries have treated it just as a byproduct or another aspect of regeneration and justification.

Now, it connects to those, but so do all aspects of the ordo salutis. It's all connected. every bit of it. But it stands alone as a great and unique blessing received by grace to those who are being saved.

[25 : 11] It's one of the greatest of blessings. You're adopted. God is your father. Wow. It is easy to think of regeneration as a moment we are born into God's family.

To be more precise, it is looked on as the moment we were reborn, born again or born from above, and become God's children by this birth.

We equate it to being born into a family. I was born into the Holland family, Mike into the Dersham family, Mr. Lee here was born into the Roberts family, and we can go around this room.

But actually, the idea of adoption does not fit this thinking. Listen to Dr. Gruden, Wayne Gruden, in his volume on systematic theology. I wish I had one.

Rob, my youngest son, borrowed it without asking. It's over in Branson. I'll get it back someday. Dr. Gruden said this, we might initially think that we would become God's children by regeneration, since the imagery of being born again in regeneration makes us think of children being born into a human family.

[26 : 26] But the idea of adoption is opposite of being born into a family. Though they are related, Scripture actually distinguishes these two blessings in several areas.

First, regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit, God the Father.

So we see a difference right there, don't we? Second, regeneration is transformative. We get transformed. It is a work in our heart that transforms our nature.

Old things pass away. What old things? That old sin nature. Now we still battle it. We're in unredeemed flesh. We're going to battle it until we go to heaven through death, or rapture.

But it is a work of transformation, a work in our heart that transforms our nature. Adoption is declarative and does not change our character.

[27 : 31] It is a legal act by God the Father which gives to those who receive Christ the right, meaning the legal authority to become children of God.

And then third, regeneration is mediated by the word of God or as the blessings of adoption are obtained by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's kind of some things that distinguish in these two wonderful areas of the order of salvation.

Adoption then is and should be viewed by us as distinct from regeneration. You can be distinct and connected because like I say they're all connected.

But how is it distinct from justification? Now we move into a different area. Both justification and adoption are declarative acts.

So there's an intimacy there. God declares us just. God declares that we're now adopted. and both are mediated through faith.

[28 : 40] So they have that additional connection. So why are they distinct blessings? Justification is an act by which God declares us righteous with respect to the demands of the law of God.

Satan is all too willing to tell the Father when we have violated one of his commands. And the Father looks at the Son and the Son says I took care of that at the cross.

He's one of mine. And the Father says I'm satisfied. The whole meaning of propitiation, the satisfaction. I am satisfied. But God in justification declares us to be righteous with respect to the demands of the law.

And what did the law demand? Perfection. Violate one, you're guilty of all. Violate one. You mean if I just I'm guilty of murder?

That's what the Bible says. That's what the Bible says. Adoption is also a legally binding declarative act whereby the divine judge of the universe says that the justified and adopted one has become a member, and get this thought down, of the divine judge's family.

[30 : 07] We move in with the judge. It's amazing. That's just absolutely amazing. It's a staggering thought. In adoption, God becomes our loving and compassionate father.

And that is why John could say in his first epistle, see what great love the father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God.

We're even referred to as the children of God. Meditate on that. And that is indeed a great idea, a great thought.

We are the children of God.