

Adoption John R Gavazzoni

There seems to be more confusion than I realized as to what the New Testament is referring to by the word, "adoption." A clear explanation is available in the notes of many good study bibles. The New Testament does NOT use the term in the sense that it is used in our culture today, that is, referring to making someone---usually a child, but it can be an adult---your child, a member of your family, LEGALLY.

Rather, it refers to the public presentation of a natural-born son---or for that matter, a legalized son---as acknowledged to be a mature, responsible son who has come of age and from that time on can conduct business in his father's name and in some measure speak and act with his father's authority.

In the teaching of the New Testament, becoming a child of God, is not presented as a legal matter, but, well, duhh, as a paternal matter, that is, one who is a child of God, is so by being born of God, born of the Spirit, generated by God from eternity and, upon this basis, in the aeon, "born from above," or REgenerated in the aeon in accordance with our eternal identity in Christ. Apparently, much to my surprise, some teachers who are quite comparatively biblically literate, are confused about this very fundamental issue.

Also, mainstream evangelicalism is to be faulted in its capricious text-selectiveness concerning the paternity of mankind. I, too, years ago, as a young evangelist, had assumed something that a careful reading of scripture does not support. I was taught, and thus assumed it to be true, that all men were children of the devil until they received Christ as their Savior.

Indeed, Jesus did, on an occasion, say to some folks, "Ye are of your father, the devil...." (Jn.8:44) I liked that proof-text in the early days of my evangelizing efforts because it seemed to state something quite clearly and give me a text with some teeth in it to confront people with their need of salvation.

Now, keep in mind that this indictment was directed toward the Pharisees, particularly in respect to their problem with Jesus freely granting forgiveness to the woman caught in adultery, and not "sinners" in general as traditional evangelists love to use it.

But the problem was that I neglected another paternity-affirming statement of our Lord found in Matt. 7:11, and I quote from the NAS: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall YOUR Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him." (Emphasis, mine.)

If we go to the end of that chapter, we find that the words were spoken to a multitude "who were amazed at His teaching...." and included those that Jesus called "hypocrite" (vs. 5) Now how do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory paternity-affirming statements of Jesus?

Well, it takes some serious reflection, meditation, and skillful comparison of scripture with scripture. Mainstream evangelicalism, in general, is unskilled at in-depth interpretation of scripture. They skip over the surface of the text, come up with shallow conclusions full of misunderstanding, and then go about claiming to be the guardians of orthodoxy and that their notions, passed down from one generation to another, as the traditions of men, ought to be received unquestioningly as doctrinal anchors.

The resolution of this seeming contradiction lies in comparing the above two statements by our Lord with His confronting Satan almost immediately following Peter's confession of faith. Jesus commends Peter's confession: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God," as having come from none other than the Father. You see, when Peter made his confession, Jesus affirmed Peter's identity in union with Himself---"Thou art Peter (stone) and upon this Rock I will build my church." There is a like-genre of Rock and stone.

But when Peter rebukes the Lord about the imperative that He go to Jerusalem to be killed, Jesus responds not by addressing Peter as Peter, but He addresses Satan. What's going on here?

Well simply, an alien, alienating, enmity- presence was speaking through Peter, and it was that enemy, that father of all enmity, that father of the lie, that Jesus addresses. He is addressing the cross-rejecting spirit.

Likewise, regarding those who Jesus said would hear Him say to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."

(7:21--23): The context is clear there. Those who would hear those words from our loving Lord were those who presented themselves in the persona of self-righteousness, and Jesus response showed that He refused to affirm them in that identity, in an identity based upon religious performance, but, rejected that Satan-birthed, alter-ego, self-righteous false-persona that was being presented to Him as making one worthy of entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

Add to this, Paul's description of God as "one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." (Eph.4:6 NAS). Now the knee-jerk, shoot-from-the-hip, unthinking protest from the average mainstream evangelical is that Paul was not talking about all men, but only all believers.

But, if any reader of this article is willing to read the whole of the Epistle to the Ephesians noting the grand theme of Paul that grace had been given him to preach the unfathomable riches of Christ to the Gentiles, that is, that the Gentiles share fully God's grace in Christ, one is lead to a much fuller "all" than orthodoxy likes to acknowledge.

Paul's former Phariseeism had been dealt a lethal blow by Christ, so that henceforth, his brethren are not just Israelites, but all men, to whom he is determined to proclaim this good news.

The almost immediate context of Paul's affirmation of the universality of God's Fatherhood begins in chapter 3, where he declares that he has been uniquely accorded an insight into the mystery of Christ, so that he might make known this mystery to THE SONS OF MEN (my emphasis). (3:5)

There is a clear contextual thread that leads from there to the declaration that God is the Father who is above all and through all and in all. All who? All the sons of men. Paul is uncompromising in his insistence that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. (3:6)

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