

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 26

Salvation – Part 2 Metaphors – Adopted And Reckoned

Do you have a junk drawer in your house? You know, one of those drawers where you put all the little things you need that do not really have a place of their own? We do – sort of. Becky has our junk drawer incredibly organized. There is one special portion of the drawer dedicated to keys.

Now, there is a problem I have found with keys. They reproduce...like rabbits, but the offspring keys do not function as the parents do (they are proper offspring, not clones!) In other words, you might start out with a few keys for specific cars or doors, but those keys quickly multiply into a bunch of keys that do not fit any lock known to man.

Any rational person would throw those non-working keys away, but we do not. I have this deep fear that one day, I will discover that the deficient keys actually open the one lock I forgot I owned. It will likely be a lock that has money or something of irreplaceable value on the other side.

So I keep all keys, unless I know for certain what the key was for, and know I will never have need for that key again.

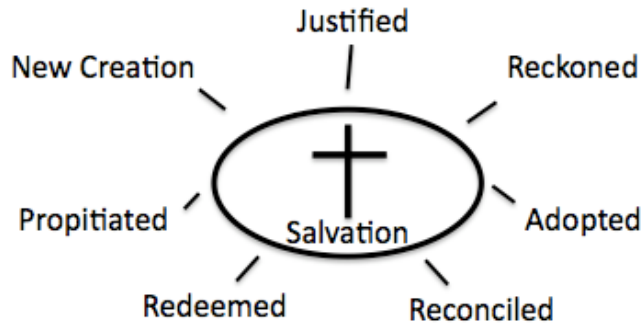
What would be helpful for me would be knowing certain key facts of history (yes, a very poor pun – *mea culpa*). I need to know the history behind each key to know what lock each one unlocks. Then, I could label the keys, or throw them away if unneeded.

History is good in that way. It provides us a point of reference to increase our understanding of our daily tools for living and knowledge. It is no less true for our reading of Scripture. As we continue to consider the metaphors Paul used to explain our salvation we will try to unlock the history behind the words.

Last week we considered two of Paul's metaphors for salvation, "justified" and "reconciled."¹ Today, we look at two more of Paul's metaphors for salvation – "adopted" and "reckoned." These words have a certain meaning to us in our culture, but if we want to more fully unlock Paul's teachings, then we need to

¹ Last week's lesson and all our lessons are available for downloading at our website: www.Biblical-Literacy.com. We also have audio for most lessons and video for some available through that sight as well.

understand the place of these words at the time of Paul’s writings. That is our goal today.



That will leave us with three final metaphors to cover in later classes.

ADOPTED

Yesterday was a very important day in the life of Rick and Kirsten. For years, I witnessed these two dear friends’ struggle with the various medical efforts to have a child together. As their frustrations grew, they decided to pursue adopting a child.

Adoption turned into its own huge project. The adoption system in the United States can be very frustrating for parents. The waiting, the selection process, the legal and social hurdles are great – so great that our friends decided to try adopting a baby from abroad.

After spending over a month in Guatemala, working through agencies, lawyers, government officials and doctors, they were finally given the wonderful chance to adopt baby Joshua (who amazingly looks like a cross between Rick and Kirsten!)

After the adoption, there was another level of legal hurdles getting Joshua a U.S. passport and bringing him home to the United States. Yesterday was the one-year anniversary of this effort. Joshua is home, growing, and happy after his adoption. You have never seen a happier family.

Paul uses “adoption” as a metaphor for the salvation experience of the believer. It would be wrong of us to use the Rick and Kirsten adoption experience as the basis for Paul’s metaphor. Paul was writing in another culture and another place and time. As we consider Paul’s use of “adoption” as a teaching point, we need to understand something of the culture surrounding the practice in his own time.

The Scriptures

Paul uses the Greek word for the Roman practice of adoption in several places. The Greek word, *uiothesia* (υιοθεσια), is not used in the Greek translation of the

Old Testament (the “Septuagint”) sharpening our understanding that Paul is pulling the term straight from cultural usage rather than religious usage. Paul uses the word as a metaphor for the Christian believer in these passages.²

Eph. 1:5 “In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”

Gal. 4:4-9 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God. Formerly when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”

Rom. 8:15-17 “For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”

Rom. 8:22-23 “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

Roman Law³

In reading this section on Roman adoption law, we urge you to consider what aspects of Roman adoption seem important in understanding Paul’s usage of this metaphor in describing our salvation experience and relationship with God. Before we flesh out this part of Roman law, we need to add two points of warning.

1. Paul was not a trained Roman lawyer. It is probably not fair to push Paul’s understanding into the deep legal nuances of Roman Family Law. That

² Paul also uses the term in reference to Israel in Romans 9:4.

³ Some might ask why we are jumping to Roman adoption law rather than considering Jewish or Greek adoption laws. There are several reasons. First, Hebrew adoption was incredibly rare (although there is a “sort of/maybe” reference to adoption in the OT as Israel is considered God’s son). For adoption for Jews outside Palestine, Roman law would have trumped Jewish law. Roman law also trumped Hellenistic practices/law. Further, while the Hellenistic practice was unusual, convoluted, and inconsistent, the Roman practice was solidly written in stone, was incredibly common place all over the empire, and was something that Paul would have understood as a Roman citizen (it was a right of the citizen).

said, much of our current knowledge of Roman Family Law on adoption indicates that the basics were such that Paul likely would have understood it to the degree that we present it here.⁴

2. As with any metaphor, there are applications that can be made and there are applications that are likely stretched beyond Paul's intended reach. This is especially true as we consider the process of adoption under Roman law. We will seek, then, to understand Roman law, but then look to Paul's actual writing and other scriptures to determine fair ways to put the metaphor to use.

In modern America, adoption generally occurs out of concern for the welfare of a child, adding a child that has no family to a family desiring a child. This was not the case in Paul's time. Roman law was sculpted around a need to adopt for other reasons. Adoption was the solution to a family in danger of dying out. Roman citizenship and society was built around the family unit. The family name, the family's estates, and the family's gods were all tied to the family unit. Failure to have offspring that continued the family line would extinguish these vital parts of the Roman way of life. Quite often, then, the adopted person was not a child at all, but an adult.⁵ Similarly, the person being adopted typically was in a family already and was, in modern parlance, exchanging one family for another. Many times the adopted adult brought significant possessions, including slaves.

A word about the two types of Roman adoption: The Roman adoption could take place in two different ways. The Latin names for these two kinds of adoption are *adoptio* and *adrogatio*.⁶ While Paul does not specify which type of adoption he meant, we agree with Williams that Paul likely meant *adoptio* (albeit for different reasons than Williams gave!⁷). There are some legal intricacies that

⁴ At the time of Paul, Rome had a select group of legal specialists who would write on legal issues based upon hypothetical questions or cases. These legal writings were intended for legal scholars, not laypeople. Still these legal rules set out the basic guidelines for court practice as well as governing daily living. For a good discussion of the actual legal rules and cases, see Frier and McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law* (Oxford 2004).

⁵ Crook, John, *Law and Life of Rome* (Cornell 1967) at 111.

⁶ *Adoptio* and *adrogatio* were two different legal methods for adoption. *Adoptio* was more common and removed the adopted person from his original family. *Adrogatio* transferred the entire family unit, not simply the adopted person. Each legal method had its own elaborate procedure. For a more thorough explanation of the Roman system of adoption see, Borkowski and Plessis, *Textbook on Roman Law* (Oxford 2005) at 135ff.

⁷ Williams cites that *adrogatio* occurred only in Rome. Whether that was true at the time of Paul, we must recognize that three of the five times Paul wrote of adoption he was writing to Romans. See William, David, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Hendrickson 1999) at 83. We are more convinced by the fact that *adrogatio* as an adoption approach was only available when a father was childless. See, Borkowski and Plessis, *Textbook on Roman Law* (Oxford 2005) at 137. Certainly, God is not without a Son!

distinguish the two, but most of the points we make about *adoptio* are equally valid for *adrogatio*.

1. The adopted son in Roman society became the absolute possession of the adopter.

The Roman world was built around the ruling male in each family unit. The Latin word for the power of this man was “*potestas*.”⁸ *Potestas* power meant that the ruling male could sell his child(ren), enslave his child(ren), had the power of life or death over a child (a power that changed later in Roman civilization), and had ownership control over any property that came to the child(ren). One could marry, only with the permission of the *potestas* father. Having *potestas* power meant that any property owned by the family was owned by the *potestas* empowered male. Now as this is written, it can be misleading. We need to remember that by child(ren), we mean offspring, regardless of age. In other words, when a man chose to adopt a son who was thirty years old, that adopting man took full *potestas* power over that adopted man. *Potestas* power continued as long as the father male lived. Once the *potestas* empowered father died, the *potestas* power passed to the next oldest male in the family.⁹

2. An adoption affected a complete legal change in one’s family. The originating family had no more claim to the person – no more *potestas* power.

This complete change in family extended to all areas. When Cicero (106 – 43 BC) took issue with a certain adoption, he compared it to normal adoptions, noting:

These adoptions, as in countless other cases, were followed by the adopted party inheriting the name, the wealth, and the family rites of his adopter.¹⁰

Cicero’s argument presents the compelling Roman factors that pushed adoption and made it so common. There was a perceived need to keep family names alive, including the property rights of the family. That called for the need of a male descendant to claim the *potestas* power of the family as well as the family name. The Roman religious cult also had household gods, particular to each home. It

⁸ Berger, Adolf, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law* (The American Philosophical Society 1991 reprint) at 640.

⁹ See Jolowicz and Nicholas, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law* (Cambridge 1972) at 118ff; Nicholas, Barry, *An Introduction to Roman Law* (Oxford 1975) at 76ff. To see the residual powers of *potestas* from the Roman/Latin culture, watch the Godfather film series!

¹⁰ Cicero, *De Domo Sua*, xiii.35, (Loeb Classical Library edition #158, at 177, transl. by N. H. Watts).

was the *potestas* empowered male who had the power to exercise the religious rites of each family. Failure to provide for a family's future (failure to have a son capable of becoming the *potestas* wielding male) meant that the family's gods would no longer be worshiped. This was deemed to weaken all of Roman society.

We can readily see, when considering the importance of having such offspring, why those families in need of an offspring would adopt someone of appropriate age to have certainty in that adopted person's ability to perform as needed upon the passing of the *potestas* empowered male.

3. When one was adopted, their possessions were all transferred to the *potestas* father.¹¹ Not only were their possessions transferred, but also their debts and obligations.

The adopting father was bound by the obligations and debts of the adopted son (or daughter, even though adoption of daughters was very rare). This transfer of obligations did not typically include the transfer of ongoing issues of a contract. Those ongoing contractual obligations were extinguished upon adoption.

The process of adopting a male son emphasized this transfer from one family to another. The process (completed in three stages) had two different emphases and procedures. In one, the old *potestas* father would release his rights over the son. In the second procedure, the adopting father would take/buy the family rights over the son. These two procedures were done three times in front of five witnesses and the appropriate public and governing officials before the adoption was complete.

Once the process was over, the adopted person was a full heir in the new family as if a blood child of the *potestas* father. The old family ties were totally extinguished along with all debts and obligations of the old life.

Application to Scriptures

Having put Roman adoption into its historical culture, now we consider the applications of Paul's metaphorical use of the term. The basics of adoption, as set out earlier, all show the good fit of the metaphor for Paul's teaching on salvation. Consider each:

1. The adopted (the believer) becomes the absolute possession of the adopter (God the Father).

¹¹ If the adopted person was already a *potestas* empowered head of his own family, then the other people in his family did not necessarily transfer over to the newly adopting father. That would depend on the type of adoption referenced earlier (*adoptio* or *adrogatio*). Under either type of adoption, however, the possessions kept by the adopted son were automatically transferred, because in a family, only the *potestas* father could hold property.

Paul wrote that God had “predestined us for adoption” (Eph. 1:5). God has *potestas* power over the believer. God has the power of life or death over each believer. God has ownership control over any property of the believer. God did not adopt the believer because the believer was fatherless, or an infant in need. God has taken the Christian, regardless of age, as his own possession.

2. The adopted believer has affected a complete legal change in one’s family. While the believer had previously been held slave and captive by sin, that old relationship has no more claim to the believer. Only God has *potestas* power over the adopted person.

We should remember that this complete change in family extended to all areas. As Cicero noted was common with all adoptions, the believer has taken on God, the adopting Father’s name. Paul says in both Galatians and Romans we believers who have received “adoption as sons” cry, “Abba! Father!” (Gal. 4:5-6; Rom. 8:15).

The believer has also taken on the father’s wealth/inheritance. Unlike the Roman family, however, this inheritance is not one that occurs with the death of the adopting Father, for God cannot die. The inheritance occurs with the death of the believer, transforming the believer into his eternity with the Father. Paul says as we have passed from our old position of slave to sin into the family of God the Father, we are inheriting sons!

So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God (Gal. 4:7).

This aspect of the adoption is attested to by the Spirit of God, which has been given as a deposit on the inheritance. Paul says in Romans 8:17,

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

In this sense, we await our inheritance, and we might say we await our full adoption, in the sense that we await our final salvation (or healing¹²) of our bodies. Paul then uses the future tense making this point in Romans 8:23,

And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoptions as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

¹² “Salvation” as a term includes the concept of wholeness and healing as set out in the last lesson. That lesson, like our other lessons, is available for download at our website, www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

As for the role of the believer in celebrating the religious rites of the family, that use of the adoption metaphor is obvious. The concept of Paul's inclusion of the Spirit as a guarantee, leads us in obedient worship, prayer, and devotion to our God and Father (see, e.g., Rom. 8:26 "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words").

3. Once adopted, the Christian's possessions were all transferred to the God the Father. But perhaps more importantly, all the believer's debts and obligations as slaves to sin were transferred.

Paul drives home this emphasis in the Galatians passage on adoption. Paul explained that prior to adoption, we lived as slaves to sin. But with adoption, we have come to relate to God in a special way as our *potestas* Father. Paul asks,

But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?"

It is not sensible for us to go back and live as slaves to sin when we are now adopted sons to God the Father!

As adopted sons, our old family ties are gone. We are full heirs in the family of God. He has assumed any obligations and debts we might have as slaves to sin (this by his sacrificial payment we discuss more fully in next week's lesson that covers Paul's metaphor of "propitiation"). We stand as children, fully children, in the family of God Almighty!

Before we move to the next metaphor, we should note a way in which the adoption metaphor does not apply. Unlike the Roman father who needed a son to carry on the name, manage the estate, etc., God has no need of us. God adopts us completely for our good. We have no merit, no attractiveness, nor any basis for deserving his adopting us.

RECKONED

When I was a young man in my mid-teens, I had a job working at Holiday Mart three afternoons a week after school. The pay was great for a freshman in High School, although it was not enough to merit a checking account! (This was before checking accounts were basically free. It actually cost a good bit to keep a checking account unless one had a great amount on deposit!) So, Dad had an idea for me. I was allowed to put my money into their checking account with the understanding I would keep my own balance sheet, always knowing the amount of money that I had on deposit.

My parasitic existence on Mom's and Dad's account went quite well for a number of months. Six months into the venture, however, Dad came to me perplexed. "Are you keeping your balance?" He asked. I assured him I was and he went back to working on reconciling the bank statement with his own checkbook.

A little bit later that afternoon Dad returned to me asking, "Are you SURE you are keeping up with your balance?" I confidently asserted, "Yes," and told him I had double-checked and I was fully up to date. Dad returned to his reconciling effort only to come one last time to me, clearly frustrated over his inability to balance his own checkbook. This time Dad asked me to show him how I had balanced my part of the account and I proudly showed him my register, filled out with each check numbered, dated, and the amounts written and subtracted. I was totally up to date.

Dad then said, "Mark, you have not kept up with your balance! This is my problem!" I really did not understand how he could say that. I had written each deposit and subtracted each written check. Dad said, "But this is wrong!" I replied, "No Dad, it isn't wrong. Don't you understand negative numbers?"

We had a communication breakdown. Dad had thought I was keeping a positive balance! I had merely been saying that I was keeping track of the money I had (or did not have) in the account. Once I ran out of money, I would continue to write checks and just keep a negative number in the balance column.

Dad explained that I was not supposed to do that. I was allowed to write checks, only to the extent I had made deposits. I could not pretend there was money where the money was missing.

Little did Dad or I know that the lesson was useful to help understand Paul's metaphors for salvation! The word? "Reckoned." Reckoned is our English word to translate the Greek *logizomai* (λογίζομαι). The Greek word had two basic meanings, both of which are reflected in our English word "reckoned."¹³ The word was used in commercial dealings of putting something down in one's account. This was an accounting use of the word that was relevant to my negative numbers and Dad! The second use of the word was not exclusive to commercial transactions. It was more akin to drawing a logical conclusion.¹⁴ Paul uses the

¹³ We speak of a "day of reckoning" meaning a time when the accounts are settled! We also use the word in the sense of "I reckon so" meaning something seems logical or well reasoned.

¹⁴ See *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans 1988), v. 4 at 54; Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Eerdmans 1967), v. 4 at 284ff.

word in both senses, but our concern here is the accounting sense of the word as it relates metaphorically to Paul's teaching of salvation.¹⁵

The Scriptures

Let us start by considering some of the passages where Paul uses the word. Consistent with the rest of these lessons, we will be taking our translation from the English Standard Version. We should note for understanding that the ESV does not use the English "reckoned." Instead, the ESV generally uses the English word "credited" or "counted."

Rom. 4:3-6 "What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was *credited* to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is *credited* as righteousness. David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God *credits* righteousness apart from works."

Rom. 4:9-11 "Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was *credited* to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it *credited*? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be *credited* to them."

Rom. 4:22-24 "This is why "it was *credited* to him as righteousness." The words "it was *credited* to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will *credit* righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Rom. 9:8 "In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise *who are regarded* as Abraham's offspring."

2 Cor. 5:19 "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not *counting* men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

APPLICATION TO THE SCRIPTURES

Who has not ever felt the squeeze of inadequate funds in the bank? How nice would it be to have unlimited funds for any need in the bank? How wonderful if

¹¹ Williams asserts that Paul uses "reckoned" in the commercial sense we are discussing here in Rom. 2:26; 4:3-6, 9-11, 22-24; 9:8; 2 Cor. 5:19; 12:6; Gal. 3:6; 2 Tim. 4:16. Beyond that Paul also uses the Greek word in a more general sense in a number of other places. Of the 40 times the verb is used in the New Testament, Paul uses it 34 times.

you could write any check any time with no fear that you were exploring “negative numbers.”

That unlimited surplus is what God has placed in our account for salvation! All of us are people who have not made, and cannot make, adequate deposits in their spiritual banks to have righteousness to spend before God. Yet, God has taken the believing Christian and reckoned (deposited) into her/his account righteousness. This is a full righteousness on which you can confidently write a check!

If righteousness could be deposited into our accounts because we earned it (*i.e.*, a “paycheck” for our good deeds!), then we would have no need for God’s grace. However, no one has adequate earnings for the righteousness of God. Hence, we are writing checks we cannot cash unless we have another source of funds! God has placed righteousness into our accounts and it is reckoned/counted to our balance statement on our behalf.

NEXT WEEK

We have now looked at Paul’s metaphors that arose from the courtroom (“justified”), from social circles (“reconciled”), from family law (“adopted”) and from the banking/accounting world (“reckoned”). We have metaphors for salvation from other areas of life still to come!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“God sent forth his Son... so that we might receive adoption as sons.”* (Gal. 4:4-5).

Have you been brought into God’s family? Have you been adopted as his own child? Do you know God as your Father? This is not something that occurs simply by being good. Nor does it occur because you came from a godly family. This does not even come from attending church. Adoption comes from God sending forth his Son. Adoption comes from being in Christ, the Son of God. This is the family to be in! Trust me, there is no better family!

2. *“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons”* (Rom. 8:15).

When you are adopted into God’s family, you are a new person. You wear a new name. Your old relationships of debt and obligation are gone. Your inheritance is established. You even have a guarantee of this by the indwelling Spirit of God. Examine your life. Do you walk as adopted

children of the Almighty? Can you see a difference between your choices and actions and those of people living under the *potestas* power of sin. Never be deceived into thinking you are not in some family. As Bob Dylan says, “You gotta serve somebody. It may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you’re gonna have to serve somebody!” As adopted children, how dare we act as though we still belong to the old family of sin! We are children of the King who has conquered sin once for all!

3. “*Abraham believed God, and it was **credited** to him as righteousness*” (Rom. 4:3).

If you are clothed in Christ, if you belong to him, then do not let Satan ever convince you that your righteousness is inadequate! Your righteousness in Christ is fully sufficient for any check you need to write! Of course, this does not mean that we are sinless; rather, that we are credited with sinlessness in spite of our own sin. God has deposited the righteousness of Christ into our account! As we see our sin, then, we can confess it, confident God sees us as righteous through our faith. We can then turn away from sin and live as righteous people should!