

**HIGHER GROUND:  
THE POWER OF BELONGING  
Ephesians 1:4b-6**

It is pictured in the sad pictures of animals in cages at the local animal control shelter. It is portrayed in the many ads for dating services. It is felt after being passed over for the team. It is delivered in the letter from the university. It is even experienced in the Sunday morning worship service at Trinity Baptist Church in Mt. Pleasant. Rejection, loneliness, alienation. Your friend didn't show up. They chose to sit with someone else today. You feel exposed, alone, out of place. Ah, the power of rejection.

Paul continued his prayer of thanksgiving for the spiritual blessings that are ours in Jesus Christ. This higher ground song began with thanksgiving for God's gracious choice. It continues with a reminder that God knows our need to belong.

**I. THE INSIDIOUS PRESSURE OF OSTRACISM AND ALIENATION**

A. As Paul came to this section of his letter, he reminded the readers that God had done something for them that was difficult to comprehend. *In love<sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,<sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.* God's gracious choice to adopt us indicates that there was an issue that had to be resolved. Prior to a relationship with Jesus Christ, we are separated from God. In Colossians 1, Paul wrote:<sup>21</sup> *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds.* Colossians 1:21 (NASB95) We were created for fellowship with God. That pattern is evidenced in the Garden of Eden. Fellowship with God was broken by sin. Sin robs us of the desire for intimacy with God and replaces it with a selfish desire for self-satisfaction. Yet,

that desire to belong, to share fellowship, never goes away. We have to find a substitute.

- B. Abraham Maslow placed the need to belong in his hierarchy of need. We have the desire to be accepted, to be a part of something or someone, to find community. We place such great importance on belonging that we are willing to do many things to accomplish it.
  - 1. Mimic behaviors
    - a. Gang initiation
    - b. Hazing for a sorority/fraternity/organization
  - 2. Adopt appearances
  - 3. Compromise values/beliefs
    - a. Sexual promiscuity
    - b. Drug use
    - c. Alcohol use
    - d. Tobacco use
- C. There is only one relationship that will completely satisfy or need/desire to belong – a relationship with Jesus Christ.

## II. THE LIBERATING POWER OF SPIRITUAL ADOPTION

- A. Paul used language that evoked a familiar picture for his readers. *In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.* Motivated by his characteristic love, God made possible our relationship with him through the sacrificial work of his son, Jesus Christ. The barrier of sin was destroyed and the way was opened to our relationship with him. He took the initiative and calls us into relationship with him. What sin destroyed, God restored in Christ.
- B. The Roman adoption system was rigorous. Adoptive parents had to be persistent and willing to pay the price. When the process was complete, the adopted

child was considered to be as much a part of the family as a biological child. This was one of the strongest expressions Paul could use to describe God's action of finding us, choosing us, loving us, and keeping us. Salvation draws us into intimate fellowship with God through Christ.

1. We have a secure sense of identity.
2. We have full access to the throne of God.
3. We have full fellowship with God. Through prayer, Bible study, fellowship with the Holy Spirit, and many other ways, we are drawn into communion with God.
4. We are rescued from the need to do compromising, self-destructive things to find acceptance and a sense of belonging. We are liberated to live above fear of rejection and alienation. We belong to Christ.

### III. THE OVERFLOWING PRAISE OF THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED

- A. Paul added a phrase to the end of this powerful description. *In love <sup>5</sup> He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, <sup>6</sup> to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.* The final result of God's salvation is that his people will praise him. Paul challenged the believing readers to revel in the fact that God chose them for this relationship with him.
- B. Our praise has three verses.
  1. Where would I be if Jesus had not saved me?
  2. Where am I because he saved me?
  3. Where am I going to be because he saved me?