

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church; I'm glad to have you with us this morning. If you were here last week, you were here for the kick off of our new teaching series, **In Christ: discovering our true identity**.

For the next seven weeks we are going to make our way through the New Testament, paying attention to what God says is true of us **in Christ**. And as I begin this morning I want to start where we finished last Sunday, with a visual reminder of who we are in Christ. Please turn your attention to the video screen, and open your heart to what is true.

- **Video: He is my identity** (3:29), <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/10263/he-is-my-identity-worship-as-a-new-creation-love>

It is amazing how loud all the other voices can be, how persuasive a lie, or a half-truth can be when it comes to shaping our identity. Many of us have allowed every other conceivable source tell us who we are, so much so, that when we hear what God says about us we have a hard time believing what he says.

Think about it this way--by and large, we live in an expert culture: we trust those with the knowledge, training, and expertise. We let mechanics work on our cars, architects build our buildings, and doctors work on our bodies. But let me ask, is there any expert who stacks up against God's expertise or knowledge? Is there anyone who sees you so completely, or knows you as thoroughly as God?

The Bible says that He's counted every hair on your head, that before a thought enters your mind, He knows it completely¹; God can account for each of the 50 trillion cells in your body. Because God made us, He can tell us who we are. He knows us, and His knowledge of us is born of love.

So this morning I want to challenge you to something...I want to challenge you to let go of the lies that are shaping you, and to refuse to accept anything less than what God says is true. Don't cheat yourself, you have a birthright, an inheritance from God--don't settle for less. And don't cheat us--we need you, the real you; we need your contribution. The truest words ever spoken about you are the words that God speaks.

Today we're going to look to the Scriptures to discover that **in Christ we are adopted sons and daughters**. At this point I'd like to invite you to turn in your Bibles with me to Ephesians 1:1-6.

And I'd like to invite you to read the first verse with me out loud--I have it for us on the video screen: "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God's holy people **in Ephesus**, the faithful **in Christ Jesus**.*"

Notice where these people live--Paul simultaneously locates them in two places: they are **in Ephesus**, and, **in Christ**. The same is true for us; we live **in Vancouver**, and, **in Christ**. For those of you who travel a lot for work, you may sleep in a different city every night, but one thing never changes: you live **in Christ**. As I said last Sunday, if

¹ Matthew 10:29-31; Psalm 139:1-6

anyone asks you in the next 7 weeks where you live, I want you to think to yourself, “I live in Christ.”

Let’s get back to the text: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To God’s holy people in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus. 2 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Let me pause one more time. Every spiritual blessing we receive from God flows from being united with Christ. I said last week that death is central to our human predicament, and that the cross is God’s saving action through Jesus. The New Testament talks about the death and resurrection of Jesus as a saving act because it is an incorporating act.

The New Testament makes it clear that when Jesus died, we died with Him; when Jesus was raised, we were raised with Him. His death is our death, His life is our life; we are saved by being drawn into union with Jesus. Jesus took on our humanity, He became what we were, so that we might receive all that is His.²

Let me continue reading, “3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in

accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

In Christ, all that is His has been made available to us, that is, every spiritual blessing, and Paul goes on to outline one such blessing: in Christ we have been chosen, we’ve been **adopted by the Father**.

The use of the word “**adoption**” is unique to Paul; he’s the only one who employs it in the Bible, and he does so five different times: Romans 8:15, 23, Romans 9:4, Galatians 4:5, and Ephesians 1:5.

Let’s take a look at Galatians 4:5-6, “God sent his Son....to redeem...that we might receive **adoption** to sonship. 6 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts”.

Now let’s look at Romans 8:15-16, “15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your **adoption** to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.

Now apart from the word “**adoption**,” which pops up in each of these three passages, I want you to notice something else: the whole Trinity is involved in the work of adoption. Ephesians 1:4 tells us that the Father **chooses**, Galatians 4:5 tells us that the Son **redeems**, and Romans 8:15 infers that the Spirit **unites** us to Jesus, and **includes** us in His status as God’s Son. So while the whole Trinity is involved, it’s because we are in Christ, the Son of God, that we become adopted sons and daughters of God.

² Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 104.

illus: Most of you who know me know that “adoption” isn’t simply a theological idea--it’s inherent in the make up of my family. Naomi and I have two children, Luke and Anna: Luke was born to us, Anna was born to another, but both are our children. As you can see from the picture, my two kids may not share the same DNA but they have a lot in common.

Naomi will tell you that when Anna first joined our family, everywhere they went people would give them strange looks--a mom with blond hair and fair skin, and a little girl with beautiful brown skin and black hair--people couldn’t figure it out. Every so often Anna and I will be walking hand in hand somewhere and I will catch someone in a sideways glance...honestly, it makes me smile...I don’t even think about the fact that we don’t look alike. But don’t tell that to my daughter.

A year ago or so, Anna and I were talking and she was saying, “*Dad, Luke looks like Mom, and I look like you...Mom has blond hair like Luke, and you have black hair like me.*” It was a precious moment but I found a way to almost ruin it. I gently tried to tell Anna that my hair is actually brown, but she put me in my place rather abruptly: “*No dad, your hair is black like mine.*” And that was that.

Last year Anna began kindergarten, and towards the end of the year, she came home one day asking Naomi a big question: “*Mom, who’s my real mom?*” I wonder how old Jesus was when He began to wonder about who His “*real*” Father was? The truth of the matter is that every human being has identity questions: we want to know who we are, where we came from, we want to make sense of our own personal history. Adopted children are no different, it’s just that they have a few extra identity gaps, a few extra questions.

Naomi wasn’t surprised by Anna’s question, and she didn’t overreact (she a great Mom), but she did want to know where the question was coming from. Anna told Naomi that some of the kids in her class had been asking--there was nothing mean spirited about Anna’s classmates, they just couldn’t figure out how Naomi and Anna fit together.

Anna’s question for Naomi was, “*why are you my mom?*” As any adoptive parent will tell you, sometimes a really simple question doesn’t have an equally simple answer. But that being said, there are some uncomplicated elements: “*Anna, God made you, He loves you, and He put our family together. Anna, before you were born, your mom and I were asking God for a little girl, and you were the answer to our prayers. God chose you, we choose you, and so you are our very own.*”

The day will come when Anna will need a more complete answer, and we will gladly give it, but for the time being it is enough for her to know that she has been chosen by God, by us, and adopted into our family.

It’s nice to be chosen, isn’t it? But being chosen implies that there is an alternative: to hire someone else, to befriend someone else, to marry someone else. And do you know what is bound up in our choosing? **Love is.** More often than not, **what we choose reveals what, or who, we love.**

Now it’s very important that you stick with me here, your identity is riding on it. Let me ask you, *does this same truth apply to God?* Does God have the same freedom to choose that we do? I suppose what I’m really asking has to do with whether God is stuck with us,

or whether He's chosen us--I think you can see that there is a world of difference between the two.

Maybe some of you, right now, are beginning to consider this for the first time in your life--you've always considered yourself to be an albatross around God's neck. *God must not have a choice, because if He did, He never would have chosen me.*

Can I get you to do something for me? I want all of us to pull out our imaginary lie-detectors and turn them on--*are they on?* Let me restate the thought one more time... *clearly God did not have a choice, because if He did, He never would have chosen me.* What do we think--truth or lie? This a lie straight from the pit of hell, and if you continue to swallow this lie, you will live **in Christ** but never really know it.

Ephesians 1:4-5 reminds us that God was not forced into adopting us--there was no gritting of His teeth or twisting of His arm. Paul writes, *"In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his **pleasure and will**".* Mark Stibbe writes, *"It pleased [God] to enfold us into the eternal family of faith. It brought him joy and thrilled his heart."*³

I can remember the night Naomi and I received a call from our adoption agency, telling us that we had just been matched with a little girl from Thailand. Via email they sent us a proposal: it had a few

details about Anna's history, and it contained 3-4 pictures. When we opened the pictures, Naomi's heart was so filled with joy that she began to cry, my heart was so filled with pleasure that I began to laugh. We made quite the pair! This was our daughter!

Augustine once wrote that there is only one Son who is God's Son by nature (Jesus Christ)--the rest of us are adopted into His family. But make no mistake, when we confess our faith in Christ, we become God's children by choice and by blood...His choice, and His blood shed on the cross. Tell me that's not real! We were adopted by choice and by blood, He chose to lay down His life, He chose to shed His blood so that we could be included. His choice and His blood are born of love.

Because we've been included **in Christ**, we cannot separate the Father's love for Christ from His love for us. We've been united to Jesus, located in Jesus, and for this reason the Father loves us as sons/daughters in the same way He that loves Christ **the** Son.⁴

Grab your Bible and turn with me to Galatians 4:6, or you can turn your attention to the screen. Paul writes, *"Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba' Father."*

It's unfortunate that this word "Abba," has so often been poorly translated. You may have heard for years that "Abba" is an Aramaic

³ as quoted by Burke, 78.

⁴ John 17:26; cf. John 16:27.

word that means “Daddy,” the idea being that we are to think of God as being like our Daddy and ourselves as being like toddlers. But it’s helpful to know that the word “Abba” was used by small children and grown children alike; it was a term of endearment for a Father that simultaneously communicated both relational intimacy and deep reverence/honour.⁵ This is the word Jesus used when He prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane, hours before He was crucified.

There’s really no English equivalent for *Abba*: “Father” is too formal, “Daddy” is reserved for small children, and “Dad” doesn’t communicate intimacy. But if you’ve ever overheard a child, maybe your child, talking to one of their friends, saying “That’s my dad!,” then you’ve heard the meaning of *Abba*--love, respect, honour.

But as one author writes, “What is most important is that the Spirit enables us to experience the same kind of intimate relationship to the Father that Jesus did, who also called God ‘Abba’ (Mark 14:36). Not only does the Spirit confer on us this status; he is also the one who, testifying with our own spirits, gives us the inner certainty of knowing that we truly are God’s dearly loved children.”⁶

Now there’s one last thing I want to convey to you before I wrap up this morning. I mentioned earlier that the use of the word “**adoption**” is unique to the Apostle Paul; he’s the only one who employs it in the Bible. But what’s interesting is that **adoption** wasn’t a common Jewish practice; Paul was picking up something that came from

Roman culture. And there are a number of unique differences between adoption in the ancient world and adoption in the 21st century; let me name just one.

Roman parents didn’t adopt primarily to fill a child-sized ache in their hearts, they adopted to carry on the family name. No doubt they too wanted a child to love but they were seriously concerned about securing an heir. Paul wants us to understand that God sees us in the same light--we’ve been adopted, and in Christ we are now heirs. Listen to Paul’s progression of thought in Romans 8:15-17: **since we’ve been chosen by God, adopted into His family, therefore we are His children, and therefore we are heirs.**

In Roman society, when a son was adopted, he got a new address, a new name, his old debts were paid in full, and he stood to receive an inheritance.⁷ An adoptive son or daughter was given the same identity and legal position as a natural born child--they were “*real*” sons/daughters. The same is true of us.

illus: If it’s helpful, think of the moment of salvation as being like the grand finale to an adoption process. **In Christ** we’ve received a new address, a new identity (son/daughter), our old debt has been paid in full, and already we are receiving our inheritance. It’s as though God picks us up at the courthouse, drives us to His/our house, walks us through the door, and then declares “*Welcome home...what’s Mine is now yours...enjoy.*”

⁵ Mark Stibbe, as quoted by Scot McKnight, *NIV Application Commentary: Galatians*, 212.

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, 261.

⁷ Francis Lyall, *Roman Law in the Writings of Paul--Adoption*, 83.

In Christ the Son, we **are** adopted as sons and daughters; this isn't wishful thinking, this is biblical fact. And the question we need to ask ourselves is, *how would our lives be different if we actually believed this?* Maybe we'd stop striving to earn God's favour--we'd realize that we already have it. Maybe we'd stop trying to prove our value and worth--His choosing, His love communicates that we have value and worth. Maybe our constant restlessness would be replaced by a deep inner rest.

One author writes, "**Security.** The feeling of being rejected is all too common in our world. Husbands reject wives and wives husbands...Parents reject children and children parents. High school students reject other students because they do not fit with the 'in group'...The sad fact is that it is increasingly difficult to find a secure and permanent relationship. As a result, people feel uneasy and uncertain."⁸

"Of course, no human relationship can ever provide ultimate security. The best-intentioned spouse can die at any time. But what our fellow humans can never supply, God does. In the midst of our disillusionment and doubt, he offers the most secure relationship imaginable: adoption into his own eternal family...**[In Christ]** We belong to the ultimate 'in group,' those who are the dearly loved children of God...our adoption is permanent. Nothing can change that; nothing and nobody can keep us from enjoying God's favor and

blessing forever."⁹ **God will not un-choose us...we belong to Him, and He belongs to us.**

I'd like to invite Jim and the worship team forward, and as they come, I'd also like to invite our ushers to come forward...they have something I'd like to get into your hands.

If you have confessed your faith in Jesus then you are **in Christ**, but if you are like me, from time to time you can be forgetful. We've got a little postcard that we've printed up that outlines who we are **in Christ**. What I'd like you to do is take this postcard home with you and put it someplace where you will see it every day--every day for the next 7 weeks I want you to read the words on this postcard, pray these words, meditate on these words...everything written on this card is straight from the mouth of God, straight from the Scriptures.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, *how would our lives be different if we actually believed what God says is true about us?* Let's find out over the next 7 weeks.

⁸ Moo, 263.

⁹ Moo, 263.