

TOGETHERFORADOPTION

“Abba! Father!” and Transethnic Adoption

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son . . . 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!’” Galatians 4:4-6

The first person who ever called me “Daddy” was my daughter, Hannah. I can still remember what it felt like as a new father to hear that word come from her young little lips. She’s now 11 years old and still calls me by the same name; and it continues to fill me with a sweet joy. Hannah is not the only one in our household who calls me “Daddy.” There are two others, Isaiah and Noah, who do so as well (pictured to the right). They are my sons through transethnic adoption. Both of them call me “Daddy” as often as Hannah does. If you visited our home on any day of the week, you would hear one White child and two Black children referring to me as “Daddy”—and my heart is filled with the same sweet joy every time I hear that name, no matter which of my children says it. I am the privileged and happy father of a multi-ethnic family.

I’m sure you have heard that *abba* (from “Abba! Father!”—Galatians 4:6) is the Aramaic equivalent to our word “Daddy.” This is often argued because of how easy the word *abba* is to say, but I think this understanding of *abba* not only over-sentimentalizes its significance but also misses Paul’s reason for using it.

The significance of the word *abba* lies not in the thought that those adopted by God now have the privilege of calling Him “Daddy.” As warm as that thought may be to many who have heard it, I’m convinced that Paul has something else in mind entirely—something that points to the unique makeup of the family God has brought together through the gospel.

Abba is an Aramaic word (Aramaic was the language the Jews used during New Testament times) with two parts. The first part, *ab*, is a standard Semitic word meaning “father.” The second part, *ba*, makes the name a form of address. We don’t have a direct equivalent in English, but the easiest way to explain *abba* is to say that you could refer to someone else’s father as *ab*, but if you say *abba*, you can only be talking to or about your father. *Abba* is probably best translated “dearest father.” Recognizing this prevents us from over sentimentalizing our understanding of *abba*.

But knowing how to translate the word *abba* does not tell us why Paul uses both the Aramaic and Greek

words for father in Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6 (“Abba! Father!”). I’m convinced that Paul utilizes these two forms of *father* from two different languages so that we realize that God the Father is not a respecter of ethnic origin when it comes to membership within His household or family.



As I have already noted, Aramaic was the language Jews used during New Testament times. Greek, on the other hand, was the language of commerce for the Gentile world at large. The Aramaic and Greek words of “Abba! Father!” respectively teach us that whatever our ethnicity, our country of origin, or our language, if we have been adopted by God the Father through faith in Jesus (see Galatians 4:5), we have the incomparable right and privilege to call God “Father”—even as our Elder Brother Jesus did on the eve of his crucifixion (Mark 14:36)! Regardless of ethnicity, those who have believed in Jesus through the proclamation of the gospel have the utterly remarkable privilege and joy of calling God “Father.”

One of the great glories of the gospel is that the Spirit of God places “Abba! Father” in our hearts and on our lips irrespective of our ethnic origins. Clearly, it is God’s great joy and pleasure to create for Himself a multi-ethnic family. So if you are a father of an earthly multi-ethnic family, be reminded of and rejoice in the glory and grace of the gospel each time you hear one of your different-race children calling you “Daddy.”

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