

TOGETHER FOR ADOPTION

Regional Conferences

WHAT IS TOGETHER FOR ADOPTION?

Together for Adoption (T4A) sponsors regional adoption conferences that focus primarily on vertical adoption (i.e., God adopting us as His children), with a secondary focus on its implications for orphan care and horizontal adoption (i.e., couples adopting children). In fulfillment of our primary objective, we desire to see conference attendees walk away from a T4A event:

- *understanding* why it is that vertical adoption is the highest blessing of the gospel
- *rejoicing* afresh in the gospel of grace
- *moved* to greater action on James 1:27 both locally and globally.

T4A's secondary focus is to explore how the great provision of our vertical adoption should impact the church's involvement in orphan care and adoption ministry. We are convinced that a greater understanding of vertical adoption within the Christian community will substantially increase interest in and passion for orphan care and horizontal adoption. The more we comprehend the grace and love extended to us through our adoption in Christ, the more passionate we will be about caring for orphans in their affliction (James 1:27). Good and robust theology leads to good and robust action.

WHAT SHOULD DRIVE THE CHURCH'S ORPHAN CARE INVOLVEMENT?

We are excited that over the past several years many churches have begun orphan care and adoption ministry

work that flows out of a deep commitment to James 1:27 and Old Testament Scripture passages that speak of God's concern for orphans (Psalm 68:5-6a; Psalm 10:14, 17-18; Deut. 10:17-19, etc). More and more churches are taking these texts seriously.

We are also encouraged that some orphan care and adoption ministries are referring to "big-A adoption" (i.e., God adopting us as His children), and a few are even linking to a fairly recent John Piper sermon on adoption. Nevertheless the work of orphan care and adoption ministry continues

to be driven primarily by texts that speak of God's concern for orphans—rather than primarily by a robust theology of adoption.

Praise God that there are ministries motivated to act by texts like James 1:27. We should applaud them and thank God for what is happening. However, churches must consider why God is so concerned for orphans in the first place. Why does Scripture stress caring for orphans in their affliction? What is really behind James 1:27 and other texts that share this concern for orphans? We are convinced that the theology of adoption is what is behind these orphan-care texts, and this theology is what should ultimately drive the Christian's involvement in orphan care and earthly adoption. *(Continued on back)*



THE HEART OF THEOLOGICAL ADOPTION

In his book *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer identifies adoption as the highest blessing of the gospel because of the relationship that it secures for those who believe in Christ. At the heart of theological adoption is the filial relationship between God the Father and His eternal Son. We really should not be able to talk about adoption without considering the Trinity. Adoption is ultimately about relationship; and the relationship that transcends all others is the relationship(s) that the Persons of the eternal Trinity enjoy with each other. Our God has always been and always will be a communion of Persons. Reciprocal love forever flows between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

So what do the eternal relationships of the Trinity have to do with the doctrine of adoption? First, there would be no biblical doctrine of adoption if God were not Triune. Think about it: If God were only one Person rather than three, there would be no love into which we could be brought to share through adoption. Only a God who is more than one Person can be love. There is much more that could be said here, but the bottom line is that if there's no Trinity, there's no adoption as sons, period.

Second—and this is absolutely staggering—God's gracious work of adoption is an activity whereby he enlarges the circle of communion that has eternally existed between the three Persons of the Trinity. The good news of the gospel is that God the Father brings us to share in the loving communion that He enjoys with His eternal and natural Son through the work of His eternal and natural Son. Through adoption God graciously brings us to participate in the reciprocal love that ever flows between the Father and His Son. This is the heart of theological adoption. T4A's passion

is to explore and articulate this wonderful truth “to the praise of [God's] glorious grace” (Ephesians 1:6).

ADOPTION'S PLACE WITHIN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

Even though the term adoption occurs only five times in Scripture (all in Paul's epistles), its “marking” function within redemptive history demonstrates its doctrinal significance. Theological adoption plays a key role from the beginning of the unfolding story of redemption (before God even created the world) all the way to the end (when all of God's adopted children enjoy the full privileges of their adoption in the new heaven and new earth).

In Ephesians 1:5, Paul states that God predestined us to adoption in eternity past. In Romans 9:4, we learn that our adoption was foreshadowed in God's adoption of Israel as His firstborn son.

Galatians 4:4-6 teaches that “when the fullness of time had come” God sent His Son to redeem us so that we might receive adoption as sons. Adoption was the penultimate objective at the climax of redemptive history.

In Romans 8:15-16, Paul speaks of our present experience as God's sons by adoption, while in Romans 8:23, he points forward to its consummation in the glorification of our bodies. Clearly, adoption possesses unique importance from the pre-temporal beginning of the unfolding story of redemption all the way to redemptive history's consummation. T4A is committed to helping Christians understand the redemptive-historical significance of God's work in adoption.

THE TRAVESTY OF BEING AN EARTHLY ORPHAN

To be an orphan is to be a human being—an image-bearer—without filial

relationships. The heart of theological adoption and its unique importance within redemptive-history tells us that we were created by God to enjoy a filial relationship with God and other image-bearers. Scripture is clear: we were made for filial relationships—and this is why we believe that God is so passionate about His people caring for orphans. T4A wants Christians to recognize that there is an entire theology of adoption behind, underneath, and around Scripture's concern for orphans that really needs to be explored and articulated.

Unfortunately, the doctrine of adoption has largely been neglected within church history. But it seems that God is beginning to work within the church to bring about its recovery; and this movement for its recovery is happening during a time when churches are awakening to their responsibility to care for orphans in their affliction.

BUILDING T4A PARTNERSHIPS

T4A's goal is to see churches partnering together with established orphan care and adoption organizations that recognize the importance of theological adoption, in order to sponsor regional adoption conference events. Ultimately, we believe that these conferences will help serve the church in fulfilling its responsibility to visit orphans in their affliction.

For more information about Together for Adoption regional adoption conferences in general or on how your church may partner with us, contact Dan Cruver at dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org or Jason Kovacs at jason@abbafund.org.

DAN CRUVER
dan.cruver@TogetherforAdoption.org