

Biblical Solutions for Life Issues
Topic 40 – Parenting: Adoption
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The same biblical principles for parenting apply to adoptive situations equally. However, due to confusion that exists even among Christians about these truths in relation to adoption, we will address certain principles in order to emphasize what God says.

Adoption in our society

This section is based upon data derived from many sources. Due to the nature of this class and existing time-constraints, I have placed the sources for this section at the end of these notes.

Adoption is understood as “the act of transferring parental rights and duties to someone other than the adopted person's biological parents.” Historically, the goal of adoption was to continue the male lineage for the purposes of inheritance and succession. As a result, most adoptees were male and could even be adults.

In modern America, adoption is seen in a broader sense beyond legal inheritance and posterity. Increasingly, adoptions have come from the innate desire to enjoy the process of parenthood among those who lack the ability to procreate biologically.

In order to understand adoption in our society we must be aware of the historical context of supply and demand.

1. The effect of delayed marriages

An increase in adoptions has corresponded with an increase in the age at the time of their first marriages. In 1900 the average age of a woman married for the first time was 23 years old. By 1950 that age had dropped to under 21 years old. Today, the average age of a woman's first marriage has increased to 27 years old.

As the age of a person increases, so does the infertility rate. The result of this gradual increase at the time of first marriages over the past sixty years is that more couples proportionately discover they are unable to have biological children. Therefore, there has been a corresponding increase in the demand for adoptive children, particularly newborns over this time frame.

2. The effect of the increased divorce rate

Divorce rates skyrocketed during the 20th century. From a rate of 10% of all marriages ending in divorce in 1900, it had gradually increased to about 25% of marriages by 1950. The 1970's saw a dramatic skyrocketing from 33% to 52% over the decade, notably due to the lifting of a barrier to divorce with the advent of “no-fault” divorce in state law through this decade. Prior to this point, anyone wanting to end a marriage had to prove the presence of adultery or cruelty in the marriage.

As second or third marriages are created, these couples may have a desire for a shared biological child but due to advancing age may encounter infertility issues. This has also added a small increase in demand for infants who were available for adoption.

3. The effect of the increase of women in the workplace

The percent of working women of child-bearing age has basically doubled since the middle of the last century. In 1950, just 34% of women 25-34 were counted in the US workforce; today the percentage is a remarkable 81% of women 25-34. The biggest shift toward women working occurred in the 1970's, which saw a jump from 45% to 65%. Younger women of child-bearing age (16-24) have also increased in the workplace but at a less dramatic 50% growth. This indicates that mothers are far more likely to continue to work than was the case a couple of generations ago.

The effect of this on the adoption rate is two-fold. First, with a movement toward the workforce, the increasing demands upon women have led to a delay in childbearing. By 2009—for the first time in U.S. history—birth rates among women ages 30 to 34 exceeded those for women ages 20 to 24. There is a belief that growing reliance on women's employment and earnings has dampened the U.S. fertility rates. Regardless, it is apparent that as a fertile couple ages, some of these couples will find the window of their fertility closing for good as they delay childbirth, thus increasing the demand for adoption.

Further affecting the adoption demand is the greater financial means that couples have with two income-earning adults. Greater financial ability corresponding with delay of childbirth leads to increase demand for adoptions.

4. The effect of adoption tax incentives

In 1997, the Taxpayer Relief Act created the Child Tax Credit and the Adoption Tax Credit. Both credits created a reduced financial burden on potential adoptive families. This infusion of financial means produced a windfall for those individuals and agencies that facilitate adoptions. In other words, adoptions are easier for couples in terms of the ability to afford the child and the professional help available to assist in the adoption process, bringing an increased demand for adoptions.

5. The effect of the legalization of abortion

One crucial data point when looking at adoption in the US is to examine the number of adoptions as a percentage of total live births. In 1950 about 1.8% of all live births resulted in an adoption. This grew to about 4.7% of all live births by the early 1970s followed by a sharp decline over a period of a decade until reaching a fairly stable rate of 3+% of all live births. The reason for this decline was the legalization of abortion and we can see the impact of this legalization in the US as mothers opted to abort their unwanted children in lieu of adoption. Abortions rose from 29,106 in 1969 (less than 1% of known pregnancies) to 1,497,670 ten years later (30% of known pregnancies). The abortion industry created a substantial reduction in the number of children available for adoption. This decrease of supply beginning in the 1970s corresponded to the increased demand, resulting in the beginning of the shortage of children available to adopt.

6. The effect of birth control

In 1938, a circuit court of appeal lifted the federal ban on birth control, allowing states to declare birth control legal. By 1972 the US Supreme Court (in *Baird v. Eisenstadt*) legalized birth control for all citizens of this country, irrespective of marital status. The Food and Drug Administration approved the birth control pill in 1960 and it soon became the primary means of birth control in the US. The increasingly safe and easy means of birth control has had an innumerable effect on unwanted pregnancies. This has reduced the supply of potential adoptive children.

7. The effect of medical advances in fertility treatment

Advances in medicine have helped many women become pregnant and carry the baby to full term. However, these advances are usually used on women who are advancing in age, and it is difficult to overcome the aging of the female's egg. Indeed, in spite of advancements in fertility treatment, infertility rates are higher in the 21st century than they were when a study was conducted in 1957.

The advancement in fertility treatment has had no net benefit in overcoming the trend toward the greater difficulty of couples in general having babies in the US. Indeed, the greatest effect of medicine on adoption has been the great improvement in the infant mortality rate and the introduction of vaccines that saved the life of millions of children, all advances that preceded the modern adoption movement in America.

8. The effect of the social acceptance of single mothers

In 1960, the proportion of children living in mother-only families was 8%, but by 1996 that proportion had tripled, to 24%. Why the dramatic increase? The Brookings Institute suggests the answer is the elimination of the "shotgun marriage." "Until the early 1970s, shotgun marriage was the norm in premarital sexual relations. The custom was succinctly stated by one San Francisco resident in the late 1960s: 'If a girl gets pregnant you married her. There wasn't no choice. So I married her.'"

Beginning in the 1970s, single women were opting to raise their child without the support of a husband. No longer did the society view the unwed mother as a disgrace. This trend diminished the availability of newborn children to adopt.

Finally, no analysis can be complete without addressing the institution that states have set up to bring unwanted and uncared for children to adoptive families, the foster care system.

In 2008, the National Center for Health Statistics released a survey that estimated nearly 600,000 women in the US are seeking to adopt children they do not know. This study noted that the "relinquishment of infants at birth is extremely rare."

The primary sources are infants through private organizations (called "extremely rare"), foreign-born children, and the foster care system. Due to the difficulty of adopting a newborn, particularly among prospective adoptive parents who are over thirty years old, international adoptions increased in popularity. International adoptions tripled in the 1970s, and peaked in 2004 with 22,991 placements. Due to increasing resentment in countries regarding the adoption of their children by Americans and the corresponding regulation that has made international adoption more difficult, international adoptions have declined steadily to 7,094 in 2013.

This means the supply of children available to prospective adoptive parents exists largely in the foster care system. In 2012, there were 397,112 children in the foster care system (down from a peak of 567,000 in 1999), still less than the estimated 600,000 women interesting in adoption. However, only about one-quarter of those children in the foster care system are available to adopt. According to adoption advocate Jeff Katz, out of every 1,000 who call a public child welfare agency seeking to adopt, only 36 actually do so. Katz wrote in the Washington Post in 2007, "too many public child welfare agencies still serve as barriers rather than as roads to adoption." I am sure those at our church with experience with the foster care system would agree.

In summary, while the demand for children to adopt grew as the average marriage age increased, the supply of children available for adoption decreased. This created a growing demand for adoptive children that has far outpaced the supply. Ten years ago, a bit less than 40% of all adoptions were private domestic adoptions. A little more than 40% were foster care adoptions and about 20% of all adoptions were international adoptions. The number of private and foster care adoptions has remained stable, while international adoptions have declined dramatically. Adoption does not appear to be getting easier as time goes on.

Adoption in the Bible

Adoption in the New Testament is a concept used by Paul and is borrowed from Roman culture. As such, the adopted child was afforded equal rights as the natural born children and under Roman law, could not be disinherited. The inheritance would be shared equally among all sons.

This resulted in the rise of adoptions that were necessitated by families with either too many sons (thus diluting the inheritance) or no sons at all. It was expensive for families without an heir to adopt a son, and at that time adoption was used to forge alliances between families. Caesar Augustus was the most well-known adoptee and he began the tradition of passing on his throne by adopting Tiberius.

It is important to note the influence that the Roman adoption customs had on the New Testament concept of our adoption as children of God. Unlike English civil law where heirs could be disinherited, adoptees were guaranteed their inheritance and the equality of their portion as well. So when Ephesians 1:5 states “He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,” we have a confidence in the certainty of our place in God’s kingdom.

Bible truths related to adoption

It is critical that we do not become confused by foolish, unbiblical thinking when we consider the subject of adoption. In this section we will address what the Bible says about certain concepts that tempt people toward confusion regarding adoption.

1. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for the purpose of equipping us for every good work, including adoption.

God’s word is true and sufficient to guide us to doing the will of God in adoption. There is certainly plenty of additional information that might save us money, inform us of legal issues, etc., but our ability to walk in righteousness exists solely through God and His revelation to us in the Bible.

Therefore, as we follow the law of Christ, we will succeed in the midst of whatever parenting situation we may find ourselves. With this in mind, here is a brief reminder of a few principles that have already been taught in other classes on parenting in this “Biblical Solutions for Life Issues” series.

- Walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16)
- Do not forsake the fellowship of believers in Christ (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Pray for wisdom (James 1:5)
- Consider the interests of others more important than your own (Philippians 2:3-8)
- Look to serve and not to be served (Mark 10:45)

First and foremost, the pathway to righteousness in the context of adoption is the same as all other life issues; we must walk humbly in a life fully committed to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Children are a gift from God (Psalm 127:3)

Like all children, adopted children are a gift of the Lord. Adopted children are not worse or better than biological children. They should be valued as people made in God's image

Furthermore, death has spread to all the descendants of Adam and all sin (Romans 5:12). All genetic material is from a fallen sin nature. There is no genetic makeup that is free from the effect of sin.

It is prideful to believe that our genes are superior (Galatians 6:3; 1 Corinthians 4:7). It is prideful to judge others based upon things like genetic material that we know little about (James 4:12). To believe that our biological children are better than the biological children of another is arrogant. Adopted children are truly a gift from God.

3. Children are a blessing of the Lord (Psalm 127:5)

When we adopt a child, we can be tempted to think we have done something special. It is not from faith that we think this because true faith understands that all we do is a mere response to God in thankfulness for His grace toward us. When we do God's will we must consider ourselves as mere unworthy servants of Christ, only doing that which we ought to have done (Luke 17:5-10).

Conversely, every child is a blessing to us (Psalm 127:5) and every good thing comes from God (James 1:17). The truth is that God blesses us with the opportunity to adopt. We are not blessing God by being willing to adopt.

4. God is the one that brings us forth from our mother's womb (Psalm 22:9)

God makes us in the womb (Job 31:15) and brings us out of the womb (Job 10:18). He likewise closes wombs (Genesis 20:18). Even when we are infertile, God is able to overcome this if it is His will (Romans 4:19-21). We can be strong in faith, trusting God's will for children.

Many consider the inability to have biological children a deep disappointment and modern psychology often encourages infertile women to grieve. Christians have increasingly adopted this perspective. "Grief is a real part of infertility" wrote Focus on the Family in 2007. While people may indeed feel grief, this grief is not from faith. The person full of faith and walking in the Spirit will consider it joy to experience the will of God, even if it is not something they would have initially desired for themselves (James 1:5).

5. The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (1 Corinthians 10:26, Psalm 24:1)

We are the stewards of our children, not the owners of our children. This truth will allow us to be willing to accept whatever the Lord brings our children's way. Some will be reluctant to begin the process of adoption due to a fear that the adoption process may not be able to be completed after becoming attached to a child. There is no doubt that a small percentage of cases begin as an adoption placement only to result in heartache when the child does not remain with the adoptive parents.

We should be filled with joy in the knowledge that God has allowed us the enjoyment of the child in our home for a time. We should trust God who works all things together for good for those who love him, even in what we consider painful (Romans 8:28). God is the creator of each child, knows best and is able to accomplish His will. Our need is faith (Hebrews 11:6).

If everything in the earth is the Lord's then He is able to distribute it according to His desires. God's purpose is according to His choice and no one can resist his will (Romans 9:11, 19). It is from our pride that we believe we are the best home for a child; if God chooses differently, then we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7). It is the very same faith that parents of biological children walk by when their view of what is best does not come about.

6. Christians have a concern for orphans (James 1:27)

Those without a father or mother are sympathetic figures to most people. Christians are described in James 1:27 as visiting them in their distress. While the application of this is varied, adoption is one possible way of putting this into practice.

In addition to the ministry to the adopted child, there is also the ministry to others involved with that child or through that adoption. From those most intimately involved, such as a birthmother, to those only doing their job, such as a case worker, the ministry of God's love through us can abound. In other words, we can look at these people as either an obstacle to our goal or as a serving opportunity. If we are seeking our own interests, we will find ourselves troubled by these various involvements but if we are seeking the interest of others we will enjoy a fruitful ministry.

7. We should refuse foolish and ignorant speculations (2 Timothy 2:23; 1 Timothy 1:4)

Certain Christian leaders have claimed truly baseless things about adopted children. Bill Gothard is an example of this when in his book *Ten Reasons Why Adopted Children Tend to Have More Conflicts*: "Adopted children are effected by the sins of their natural parents, and these sins are usually very severe" and "If the child is too young to understand, pray for the child. Confess your sins and acknowledge the sins of the natural parents. Ask God to rebuke Satan and free the child from any unbelief or rebellion from the lives of the parents."

Neil Anderson, an evangelical author on spiritual warfare, recommends prayer for adopted children, whom he considers to be extremely vulnerable to demonic influence, "I renounce the sins of this child's ancestors and all curses that have been passed on from generation to generation."

These types of foolish speculations hardly encourage believers to adopt children, and teach a mistaken understanding of how the evil one opposes God's work in us. We should be skeptical when people claim that adoptive children are uniquely challenged in some sort of spiritual fashion.

8. Love is the fulfillment of the Law (James 2:8-9)

Rebecca Walker in her book *Baby Love* writes, "I don't care how close you are to your adopted son or beloved stepdaughter, the love you have for your non-biological child isn't the same as the love you have for your own flesh and blood." Walker's expression is controversial but not without support. Nancy Verrier, author of *The Primal Wound* notes, "I wouldn't say that I love my adopted daughter or my biological daughter differently - I would do just about anything for either of them - but I would definitely say the bond is different and I know now that is inevitable."

These are two examples of a view that speaks of love in an emotionally-driven fashion, in contrast to the sacrificial love that the New Testament calls us to. Christ love through us comes from God and is a choice we make (1 John 4:19-21). To choose to love one child less than another child is to show partiality, which transgresses the will of God (James 2:9). Those who espouse a greater love for their biological children have a serious misunderstanding of God's love.

9. Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:25)

Ephesians 4:25 says "laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you." We must not succumb to the idea that we should tell our children something that isn't true, and this is a temptation for many with their adopted children. As children grow up they have an increasing ability to understand. General descriptions of issues like where babies come from serve the curiosity of little ones but there comes a time where more information is required. To communicate falsely is more than just a bad idea, it is sinful.

Just like with all children, adopted children should be raised in truth about all things and as they grow older they will gain an appreciation of the significance of this information. There should never be a time where they feel deceived or misled since this will harm the trust in the relationship and cause doubts about other things that have been told to them. We can tell them they are adopted before they even understand the concept, and then this will never be an issue. We can give them information about the story of how they came into your family as they have interest, and this will save hardship in the future.

Concluding thoughts

The ministry that we can have in light of God's truth as it relates to adoption can be significant.

1. We should strongly encourage pregnant women to choose adoption instead of abortion.

Abortion is morally wrong, although legal in most cases. If the woman is a believer, we can discuss this based on God's word (see the VBC position paper on abortion for more information). If the woman is not a believer, there is still an abundance of medical and philosophical data to lead a person toward the blessings of adoption.

2. We should be willing to advise pregnant women who are single of the benefits of adoption for their child.

Adoption is a good choice for many women with an unwanted pregnancy. It has become increasingly common for women to elect to raise their child themselves, particularly with the increase in social services. If they choose this option, we should be loving and supportive. But to fairly and intelligently discuss the options with such a woman may serve them greatly.

3. We should be willing to help those seeking adoption.

Whether for a birthmother or birthparents, adoption can be spiritually, physically, emotionally, and financially challenging. Supporting them, particularly with God's word, is a wonderful thing.

4. We should visit the orphans in their distress.

There are a great many children who are in foster care, who are being raised by people other than loving parents, who have been neglected by absent or distant parents, and who are largely raising themselves. These children may not behave as properly as we would like them to. These children may or may not live in our neighborhood. These children may or may not go the school with our children. But Christ loves children and we should help them come to Jesus (Luke 18:16).

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