

ADOPTION

INTRODUCTION



- Traditionally, adoption has been viewed as one aspect of salvation and therefore one part of the *ordo salutis*
- However, some have argued that it should be understood as summarizing the entire doctrine of salvation and therefore not merely an individual component of it
- But it is probably best to take it as both...a concept which captures the entirety of God's saving work...and a definite aspect of salvation

¹ <https://visualtheology.church/shop/posters/systematic-theology/the-ordo-salutis/>

- “Spiritual adoption is the excellency and apex of God’s salvation...What a stupendous wonder adoption is. Wilhelmus a Brakel put it this way: ‘From being a child of the devil to becoming a child of God, from being a child of wrath to becoming the object of God’s favor, from being a child of condemnation to becoming an heir of all the promises and a possessor of all blessings, and to be exalted from the greatest misery to the highest felicity – this is something which exceeds all comprehension and all adoration.’”²
- In understanding what adoption is, it is critical to also understand what it is not:
 - It is not regeneration...this is clear because regeneration and adoption deal with two different problems
 - Regeneration deals with our nature...which, prior to Christ, is sinful, depraved, and dead spiritually
 - Adoption deals with our status... which, prior to Christ, is one of alienation and condemnation as a result of being children of wrath and of the devil
 - “Adoption gives us the privilege of sons, regeneration the nature of sons.”³
 - “God has done what no human father and mother can do when they adopt a child – change the personality and the nature of the child they have adopted so that it is like theirs. But God, in regeneration, has allowed His born-again children to become partakes of His own loving, holy nature as their Father in heaven.”⁴
 - It is not justification...which deals with our need for forgiveness and reconciliation with God...it is a legal change whereby the sinner is declared righteous
 - However, in adoption the sinner is brought into God’s family
 - Clearly, adoption could not happen without justification...but adoption is fuller and richer in that God is not seen as a judge but as a father
 - “Though both justification and adoption are forensic concepts...their practical outworkings differ substantially. Justification in abstraction from adoption leaves us with a rather bare, legal concept – though, of course, the privilege of having our sins forgiven and being made acceptable to God must never be underestimated. But adoption enlarges our understanding of what it means to be acceptable to God...We are acceptable as sons of God who have the privilege of calling God our Father and bear the responsibility of serving Him as His children.”⁵
 - It is not sanctification ...adoption is the placing of a believer into God’s family...sanctification is the practical outworking of that reality in the life of a believer

THE DEFINITION OF ADOPTION

- The word *adoption* (*huiiothesia*) means “placing as a son” and describes the rights and privileges as well as the new position of the believer in Christ
- In adoption the believer is released from slavery into freedom and maturity in Christ
- God took children who were not his children and made them his own and treated them as if they were his children
- In short, God adopted all those who would believe in him and treated them as if they were his natural sons and daughters
- The word is taken from Roman custom where, in a legal ceremony, the adopted son was given all the rights of a natural-born son

² Joel Beeke, *Heirs With Christ: The Puritans on Adoption*, 17.

³ Stephen Charnock

⁴ Beeke, *Heirs With Christ*, 26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

- Adoption was not common in Jewish culture...although there are some OT examples of it (Moses by Pharaoh ...Mephibosheth the crippled son of Jonathan adopted by David)
- Adoption was common in the Roman Empire...adopted sons were often chosen to deliberately by his adoptive father to perpetuate his name and inherit his estate
- In that sense, the adopted son was in no way inferior to a son born in the ordinary way...in fact, in many cases the adopted son sometimes had a greater prestige and privilege than the natural children
- Under Roman rule, if a father was disappointed in his natural son's skill or character, he would search diligently for a boy available for adoption who demonstrated the qualities he desired
- If the boy proved himself worthy, the father would take the necessary legal steps for adoption
- Adopted sons enjoyed the same privileges as natural born sons....and at death of the father, the adopted son would often inherit the estate
- In this rite, four things happened:
 1. The adopted person lost all rights in his old family, and gained all the rights of a fully legitimate son in his new family
 2. He became heir to his new father's estate
 3. The old life of the adopted person was completely wiped out. For instance, legally all debts were cancelled; they were wiped out as if they had never been.
 4. By the law, the adopted person was literally and absolutely the son of his new father
- Paul employs this Roman background to describe the Christian's new status in Christ

Romans 8:14-17 ~ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. 15 For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! **Father!**" 16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.

- There is clear "family" terminology reflected in this passage
- The Holy Spirit leads us (v. 14) – He leads us unto holiness (cf. Gal 5:18)
- The Holy Spirit adopts us (v. 15) – believers are adopted sons, not slaves...so we are not enslaved to fear... which is why we can refer to God as "Abba Father"...we can call God Father in the same way Christ did
- The Holy Spirit confirms us (v. 16) – He testifies and bears witness with and through our spirits that we belong to God...this is part of his ministry of assuring us that we are truly saved...he confirms the validity of our adoption by the fruit he produces in us
- The Holy Spirit promises us (v. 17) – He guarantees that we are both "heirs of God" (we get to inherit God himself) and "heirs with Christ" (we share in the inheritance God gives to Christ)
- "Adoption is God's act of making otherwise estranged human beings part of God's spiritual family by including them as inheritors of the riches of divine glory"⁶
- "Adoption is the authoritative translation of a believer, by Jesus Christ, from the family of this world and Satan into the family of God, with...all the privileges and advantages of that family [which entails] membership in that family, where God is the Father, Christ the elder brother, all the saints and angels brethren and fellow-children, and the inheritance a crown immortal and incorruptible."⁷
- "Adoption is a family idea, conceived in terms of love, and viewing God as father. In adoption, God takes us into his family and fellowship – he establishes us as his children and heirs. Closeness, affection and generosity are at the heart of the relationship. To be right with God the Judge is a great thing, but to be loved and cared for by God the Father is greater."⁸

⁶ Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms

⁷ John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, 2:207, 209.

⁸ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, 207.

- “Adoption...is an act of transfer from an alien family into the family of God himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege.”⁹

Adoption is Secured in the Past

- The act of adoption is connected with predestination, having taken place in eternity past but realized when the person believes in Jesus Christ

Ephesians 1:5 ~ predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

- Adoption is the result of predestination which took place before the foundation of the world
- God marks out some in eternity past, wraps his loving arms around them, and says, “This one’s mine”... which results in him bring them into his family

Adoption Places the Believer into God’s Family in the Present

- God lovingly freed us from the bonds of slavery and put us in his family to be his children
- He took children who were not his and made them his own and treated them as if they were his children
- God adopted all those who would believe in him and treated them as if they were his natural sons/daughters

John 1:12 ~ But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become **children of God**, even to those who believe in His name

- Notice that John uses three negatives to eliminate any vestige of human contribution to salvation:
 - “not of blood” – not by physical birth
 - “nor of the will of the flesh” – not a result of natural desire
 - “nor of the will of man” – not by human decision
- Thus, the gift of sonship becomes ours not through being born, but through being born again
- It not a natural sonship, but an adoptive sonship

Galatians 3:26 ~ For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:19 ~ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household,

Hebrews 2:11-12 ~ For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 saying, “I WILL PROCLAIM YOUR NAME TO MY BRETHREN, IN THE MIDST OF THE CONGREGATION I WILL SING YOUR PRAISE.”

1 John 2:13 ~ I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father.

1 John 2:23-23 ~ Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 As for you, let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.

1 John 3:1 ~ See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called **children of God**; and *such* we are.

- It is amazing to consider...because of our adoption and sonship, the whole realm of family love and care and privilege has been given to us as God’s children

⁹ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 134.

- “The concept of adoption is familiar to us because it remains common in today’s world, and it is a rare case when the story of any particular adoption fails to warm the heart. Eager to love and care for a child they have never met and who can do nothing to repay them, parents fill out stacks of paperwork, incur significant expenses, and often travel thousands of miles in order to welcome a little boy or girl into their family. After months and sometimes years of preparation, everything changes in a moment when the judge legally declares the child to be a member of his new family, with all the requisite rights and privileges. In many cases, if adopted children had remained in an orphanage or in the care of abusive and neglectful birth parents, the outcome would likely have been tragic. But through the intervention of a compassionate benefactor, adopted children are welcomed into the loving home of a new family eager to provide protection, instruction, and the hope of a future.”¹⁰
- Charlie Wingard, a seminary professor and pastor described his adoption this way: “A decision made in 1958 proved to be the defining moment of my life. Of course, I played no part in it; I was only a few months old. My Dad and Mother’s decision to adopt me and take me out of an orphanage in Arkansas was theirs alone. No decision since then had had more significance for me: it placed me in a home where I was taught Christ, and set the trajectory for my entire life. Everything most dear to me – my salvation, my family, my vocation, and my church – have come to me, humanly speaking, through my parents’ decision to adopt. So you’ll forgive me if I find the word adoption one of the most beautiful in scripture. I made no contribution to the most important decision ever made about me – my adoption...a good truth for a future minister to keep in mind.”¹¹

Adoption will be Fully Realized in the Future

Romans 8:19-23 ~ For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

- How can adoption be both past and future at the same time? → vv. 15-16 indicate we have already been adopted
- We have already received our adoption since we have been brought into God’s family...nothing will ever change that...we have been given the full rights of sonship even though we are not naturally children of God
- Yet there is more to our adoption than we now experience...what we have now is real, but it is not the whole...there is a part of our adoption that is not yet complete...the redemption of our body is still future
- So, in a very real sense, an element of our adoption is still future...because the redemption of our body is still future
- This is what we look forward to...the transformation of our earthly body...that’s when our sonship comes to its full fruition and enjoyment...we will rise from the dead and receive a glorified body
- This is what “the redemption of our body” refers to...our future bodily resurrection!
- This is called the “revelation of the sons of God” (v. 19) and “the glorious freedom of the children of God” (v. 21)...adoption reaches its final fulfillment in eternity future...thus, it spans the ages!

THE BLESSINGS OF ADOPTION

- In adoption, those who are not natural children become as if they are natural children with all the blessings that come with it

¹⁰ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*, 624-625.

¹¹ Cited in Terry Johnson, *The Excellencies of God*, 169.

- That’s exactly what happens when God adopts children into his family...those who have no right to be in his family are adopted in such that they have all the blessings that come from being in the family of God

Galatians 4:1-7 ~ Now I say, as long as the heir is a child, he does not differ at all from a slave although he is owner of everything, 2 but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by the father. 3 So also we, while we were children, were held in bondage under the elemental things of the world. 4 But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, 5 so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive **the adoption as sons**. 6 Because you are **sons**, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a **son**; and if a **son**, then an heir through God.

- Notice that there is a subtle transition in this text: vv. 1 and 3 refer to children...vv. 4-7 refer to sons
- “children” refers to young children...“son” refers to adult children
- “children” refers to us when we were unbelievers...when we were dead in our sin and slaves to it → v. 3 ~ we were children held in bondage under the elemental things of the world
- “It is best to see [the elemental things of the world] here as a reference to the basic elements and rituals of human religion (see note on Col. 2:8). Paul describes both Jewish and Gentile religions as elemental because they are merely human, never rising to the level of the divine. Both Jewish religion and Gentile religion centered on man-made systems of works. They were filled with laws and ceremonies to be performed so as to achieve divine acceptance. All such rudimentary elements are immature, like behaviors of children under bondage to a guardian.”¹²
- Prior to salvation, they were enslaved by their attempts at keeping the Law to earn God’s favor...as such they were in bondage
- But that all changed when Christ came (v. 4)...once we were helpless little children stumbling around in a dark world trying to earn our way to God through our own works...but now in Christ, we are adopted as sons, fully complete in Christ
- The theme of Gal 4:4-7 is sonship because in these verses, the word “son” occurs 6 times
 - 2 times it refers to Christ (vv. 4, 6)
 - 4 times it refers to those made God’s sons through adoption (vv. 5, 6, 7)
- God sent His one and only natural Son so that we could become God’s adopted sons
- Christ is the only Son of God by nature...Jesus is not God’s adopted Son...he is God’s natural Son
- Through his death and resurrection, he adopts unnatural children as his own

We Experience Redemption (v. 5)

- In order to adopt us, God had to first redeem us which was accomplished when Christ actually purchased us from slavery to sin and from the sentence of eternal death
- The word “redeem” was often used in that day of buying a slave’s freedom

We Receive the Holy Spirit (v. 6)

- The Roman process of adoption requires the presence of seven witnesses
- Their testimony was important because if, after the adoptive parent’s death, his natural children contested the validity of the adoption, the witnesses had to testify that a valid adoption had taken place
- In the same way, we have a witness that testifies to the validity of our adoption by God
- The one who testifies that our adoption is valid and true is none other than God himself
- God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts
- The Holy Spirit is present in every true child of God to give evidence of their position in God’s family

¹² John MacArthur Jr., ed., The MacArthur Study Bible, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1794.

Romans 8:14, 16 ~ For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God...The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God

- Because we possess the Spirit through adoption, we have One who leads and guides us in paths of obedience, putting in us desires to live in a godly way and leading us into holiness
- He also confirms our salvation and provides us assurance of faith

We Can Call God “Father” (v. 6)

- The crying here in this verse is done by the Holy Spirit...because the Spirit is God, he can call out to God and call him “Father”
- Because the Holy Spirit lives in us and has taken us residence in our hearts as a confirmation that we have been adopted by God, we also can cry out to God “Abba, Father” (Abba = Aramaic for “daddy, papa”)
- The result of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is that we have a close intimate relationship with God the Father

Romans 8:15 ~ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!”

- One of the most wonderful realities of God’s nature is that he is a Father to his children
- This speaks of a close, intimate relationship...one in which his children are invited to come to him
- It speaks of the tenderness of God
- Once we were sinners living in fear...now we are sons in the care of our heavenly Father
- Once we were strangers...now we are intimate friends
- Our adoption into his family means that we can come into God’s majestic presence and say, “Daddy”
- Fathers usually love, protect, and provide for their children...in a similar way, all that a father is to his child, our God is to us

Matthew 7:9-11 ~ Or what man is there among you who, when his son asks for a loaf, will give him a stone? 10 Or if he asks for a fish, he will not give him a snake, will he? 11 If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!

- Clearly, God is a gracious Father who provides all that his dear children need
- One of the most staggering realities is that we get to call God our “Father”
- The heart of the NT message is that God is a Father to his children
- “What is a Christian? The question can be answered in many ways, but the richest answer I know is that a Christian is one who has God as Father”¹³
- “To know the omnipotent, infinite, incomprehensible Creator and Judge as Father is a gift of grace, not a right of birth”¹⁴
- “You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase, if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator. In the same way, you sum up the whole of New Testament religion if you describe it as the knowledge of God as one’s holy Father. If you want to judge how well a person understands Christianity, find out how much he makes of the thought of being God’s child, and having God as his Father. If this is not the thought that prompts and controls his worship and prayers and his whole outlook on life, it means that he does not understand Christianity very well at all. For everything that Christ taught, everything that makes the New Testament new, and better than the Old, everything that is

¹³ Packer, *Knowing God*, 200.

¹⁴ Johnson, *Excellencies of God*, 162.

distinctively Christian as opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the Fatherhood of God. ‘Father’ is the Christian name for God.”¹⁵

- “The people of God are the sons of God the Father and he sustains to them this highest and most intimate of relationships. This fact enhances the marvel of the relationship established by adoption. The first person of the Godhead is not only the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ but is also the God and Father of those who believe in Jesus’ name... Could anything disclose the marvel of adoption or certify the security of its tenure and privilege more effectively than the fact that the Father himself, on account of whom are all things and through whom are all things, who made the captain of salvation perfect through sufferings, becomes by deeds of grace the Father of the many sons whom he will bring to glory?”¹⁶
- “One of the greatest privileges of our adoption is being able to speak to God and relate to him as a good and loving Father... This relationship to God as our Father is the foundation of many other blessings of the Christian life, and it becomes the primary way in which we relate to God. Certainly it is true that God is our Creator, our judge, our Lord and Master, our teacher, our provider and protector, and the one who by his providential care sustains our existence. But the role that is most intimate, and the role that conveys the highest privilege of fellowship with God for eternity, is his role as our heavenly Father.”¹⁷
- Some have argued that those who lacked a good example in their earthly father cannot appreciate the fatherhood of God... that those who grew up with an abusive dad or a distant dad or an absent dad cannot relate to God as their Father
- However, “the thought of our Maker becoming our perfect parent – faithful in love and care, generous and thoughtful, interested in all we do, respecting our individuality, skillful in training us, wise in guidance, always available, helping us to find ourselves in maturity, integrity, and uprightness – is a thought which can have meaning for everybody,”¹⁸ regardless of what their earthly father was like.

We Become Heirs (v. 7)

- The result of adoption is that we become “an heir through God”... coheirs with Christ

Romans 8:17 ~ and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ

- We become fellow heirs with Christ... we stand to inherit everything the Christ possesses including salvation, glory, heaven, the universe, and God himself
- All the privileges and benefits of heaven are stored up for us because we belong to the King and are members of his family, who will reign with Christ over his coming kingdom
- This inheritance, stored up for us in heaven, is currently ours

1 Peter 1:4 ~ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you

- The overarching blessing of adoption is probably best summarized as heirship
- “I say, whatsoever thou art in the world, Jesus Christ is not an heir to more than thou hast an interest in. Thou art as certain of thy salvation and glory as it is certain that Jesus Christ shall be happy for ever; because thou art a co-heir with Jesus Christ. You know, when men are co-heirs, the title of one is as certain as the other. If you be but a co-purchaser with another, then you have as true a right in such a land or house as they have... ay, but it is more to be a co-heir than a co-purchaser: the right of inheritance is better and a

¹⁵ Packer, *Knowing God*, 201.

¹⁶ Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 139-140.

¹⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 739.

¹⁸ Packer, *Knowing God*, 204.

more noble right than the right of purchase...Oh, who can utter the soul-satisfying, soul-ravishing consolation there is in this, that the same God that is the God of Jesus Christ is my God, and the same Father that is the Father of Jesus Christ is my Father!”¹⁹

Other Benefits

Discipline

- Although it may not appear as a privilege, we have the benefit of being disciplined by the Lord as his children
- In the same way earthly children grow in obedience as a result of their father’s loving discipline, so we grow in godliness and holiness when we are lovingly disciplined by our heavenly Father

Hebrews 12:5-7 ~ and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reprovved by Him; 6 For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives.” 7 It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

Prayer

- Because God is our Father, we can freely come to him in prayer

Matthew 6:9 ~ Pray, then, in this way: ‘Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.

Relationships with Fellow Believers

- Fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are fellow family members...love is the implication of common paternity

1 John 4:7 ~ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

- These relationships constitute our spiritual family, provide us the opportunity to engage in the “one-anothers,” and provide the context for genuine “body life” through which we are helped on our pathway to spiritual maturity
- “The church is not merely a social club or a political organization knit together by common interests or shared hobbies. By virtue of the electing work of the Father, the redemptive work of the Son, and the regenerating work of the Spirit, we are objectively united to one another as members of the same family... We will always belong to one another. Because of the adopting grace of our Father, we face life’s darkest trials alongside our brothers and sisters as the family of God.”²⁰

¹⁹ Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Saints’ Happiness*, 192-194.

²⁰ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 630.