

ON ADOPTION

The privileges of our union with Christ are innumerable; they are higher than the heavens and deeper than the depths of the sea. They are commensurate with the unfathomable depths of the love of God, Himself. As great as His limitless capacity to love, so great the scope of benefit and blessing accruing to the repentant sinner who is united to Christ. That aspect of salvation serving to qualify the believer to actually share in the vast treasures of God's love is *adoption*. As faith is the flip side of repentance, adoption is the converse of justification. Justification legally moves one from a position of condemnation into a status of righteous; adoption actually confers upon the believer the actual fruits of the new status. Or put another way, "justification addresses the question of one's relationship to the law, and definitive sanctification addresses the question of one's relationship to the power of sin, adoption addresses the question of one's relationship to God the Father Himself."¹

Adoption: is the authoritative transfer of the believer from the family of Satan and the world into the family of God. It is inclusive of the full rights and privileges implied in a familial relationship.

It is helpful at the outset to briefly examine the various scriptural presentations of the fatherhood of God.²

1. Inter-trinitarianism Fatherhood: This denotes the exclusive relationship existing between the Father and the Son and is not shared, nor is it sharable. Thus the Son is *monogenes* 'unique' or 'only begotten.'
2. Creative Fatherhood: Though rare Scripture speaks of the relationship God sustains to the creative order. This cannot be restricted to God the Father, because all three persons of the Godhead were active in the creative work. **Cf. Acts. 17:28, 29; Hebrews 12:9; James 1:18.**
3. Theocratic Fatherhood: This refers to God's adoption of Israel as His chosen people. **Ex. 4:22-23; Isa. 1:2; 43:6; 63:16; Hosea 11:1; Mal. 1:6; 2:10; Ro. 9:4.**
4. Adoptive Fatherhood:

The term *adoption* itself necessitates consideration of the Father relationship God sustains with the believer. Many today confidently assert the universal fatherhood of God. This is unobjectionable when taken to imply simple creative fatherhood. However, all such notions denoting the loving father/child relationship typical of our understanding must be rejected. This is but another way of saying that the doctrine of adoption exists precisely because there is not a natural Father/child relationship in that sense. God, in grace gives this privilege.

¹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p.761.

² John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol.2, p. 223-5.

Jn. 1:12. Those outside of this grace based relationship are properly considered children of wrath (**Eph. 2: 1-3**) and children of the Devil **Jn. 8:33-47**.

This dynamic has its roots in the Fall. In the Fall the entire race was sold under sin and into servitude to the Devil. He became the Father of all Adam's natural descendants. It is only through the redemptive work of Christ the any are brought out of this prison house into the light of God's love. **Ro. 5:12-21**.

A. According to a human conception of the term 5 components are essential to the process of adoption.

1. He must be the child of one family or another, as all are.
2. There must be a family to which this child is not entitled, that he will be grafted into.
3. Someone with appropriate authority and power must make the transfer.
4. The child must be released from all obligations to the previous family.
5. The child must receive full rights to the family to which he is grafted into.

B. All five are included in the scriptural presentation of adoption.

1. We were 'by nature children of wrath' and 'under the dominion of darkness.' **Eph. 2:1-3; Col. 1: 12-14**.
2. Though we had no inherent rights and were in no way deserving, we were grafted into the family of God. All privileges were lost in Adam, a cherubim with a flaming sword was posted at the east end of the garden to cut off access. We became children of the Devil and wrath, but God grafted us into His family, making us fellow citizens and members of God's household. **Gen. 3:24; Eph. 2:1-3; 2:19**.
3. An authoritative transfer was enacted and proclaimed by one with the appropriate authority. Christ Himself has given the authority and God the Father ratified it. **Jn. 1:12,13; Col. 1:12-14**. This is demonstrated in three ways.
 - a. Angels: It is authoritatively declared to the angels through the gospel. Cf. **Eph.3:10**. Christ directly reveals it to them. **Lk. 15:8-10; He. 1:14; 12:22; Rev. 3:5**.
 - b. Satan: It is judicially declared to Satan when his power is bound and the exercise of his dominion is curtailed. **Lk. 11:21,22**.
 - c. The Believer: Christ, by the Spirit testifies to the conscience of the believer that he is, in fact, now a child of God. **Ro. 8:14, 14; Ga. 4:4-6**.
4. The release from old obligations and the bestowal of new privilege can be combined. The scripture's depiction of the nature of adoption is inclusive of these two elements.
 - a. **Liberty**: The arrival of the 'Spirit of Adoption' in the heart of the believer is the arrival of liberty from the long captivity to sin and Satan. **Isa. 61:1; Lk. 4: 18-20; Ro. 8:12-17; Ga. 4:1-6**.

- b. **Title:** The believer through adoption receives a corresponding title or 'right' in the household of God.
 - i. Title to share in the administration of the household of God. **Eph. 1:11-14.**
 - ii. Title to the privileges of the household of God. **Eph. 2:19; Ro. 8:17; Ga. 3:29; He. 12:23.**
 - c. **Boldness:** The believer enjoys boldness of access to God through Jesus Christ. **Ro. 5:1-11; 8:12-17; He. 2:10-13; 4:14-16.**
 - d. **Correction:** The Believer receives correction through the Father's adoptive love. **He. 12:5-13.**
- C. **The Source of Adoption:** The origination of adoption is God the Father. Adoption has its genesis solely in the Father's compassion for the plight of man in sin. God sought and planned a way of restoration for sinners unable to help themselves. ***In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will-to the praise of His glorious grace. Eph. 1:4,5.*** It was done without respect to any merit perceived or anticipated from the sinner. It was motivated by His love and done with respect to His own glory. So that, ***"in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus."*** Eph. 2:7.
- D. **The Nature of the Sonship:** The status conferred by adoption is a very real and actual Sonship. However, the scriptures carefully preserve a distinction between the status of believers and the Son of God. As Joseph and Daniel was second only to the throne so the believer, while enjoying the ripest fruits of adoption conceivable, still do not become divine as it is something not possible to confer on a created being.
- a. Jesus preserves this distinction. In **Matthew 6:9**, ***"This, then, is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.'"*** Jesus carefully exempts Himself from the address. The distinction becomes even more clear in **John 20:17**, ***"...I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."***
 - b. Yet the status is of so great a privilege it can be described as no less the heir. ***"...We are heirs- heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ..."*** **Ro.8:17.** While is no less than divine Sonship it does not constitute its recipients as divine. There, still is but one living and true God.
- E. **The Spirit of Adoption:** The work of the Holy Spirit in adoption is to testify to the believer the reality of the divine Sonship, sealing it to the soul in actual experience.
- a. In **Eph. 1:13**, the Spirit's sealing is seen to be an accomplished fact occurring at the moment faith is exercised. ***"And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the***

gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession- to the praise of His glory." Eph.

1:13. It must be noted that here the Spirit acts as both seal and sealer.

- b. The presence of the Spirit marks the permanency of the act. He, acting as 'pledge' seals the adoption until the consummation of the 'redemption', which can only take place in glory. Glorification is an irreversible status.

The shorter catechism aptly crystallizes the biblical conception when it states, "Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number; and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God."³

³ *Shorter Catechism*, Question 34.