



# Adopted into God's Family

ROB VENTURA

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# ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY

## London Baptist Confession of 1689, chapter 12

*All those that are justified, God vouchsafed, in and for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ, to make partakers of the grace of adoption, by which they are taken into the number, and enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God, have his name put upon them, receive the spirit of adoption, have access to the throne of grace with boldness, are enabled to cry Abba, Father, are pitied, protected, provided for, and chastened by him as by a Father, yet never cast off, but sealed to the day of redemption, and inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation.*

(Ephesians 1:5; Galatians 4:4-5; John 1:12; Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 6:18; Revelation 3:12; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 2:18; Psalms 103:13; Proverbs 14:26; 1 Peter 5:7; Hebrews 12:6; Isaiah 54:8-9; Lamentations 3:31; Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 1:14; Hebrews 6:12)

## Introduction

**F**AMILY matters. Being part of a family matters. Being part of God's family matters most. True Christians are part of God's family.<sup>1</sup> They make

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<sup>1</sup> For the specific marks of the children of God, I point the reader to Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2007), 2:427–30. Also, see Joel R. Beeke and

up the family of God on the earth (Gal 6:10). When they pass from this life to the next, they will join the family of God in heaven (Eph 3:14-15). How does this great spiritual change happen in the lives of people who by nature are children of the devil (Joh 8:44)? How do sons of disobedience become sons of God and members of His household (Eph 2:2, 19)? The answer, according to the Bible, is adoption. Adoption into God's family is a glorious doctrine. It is one which is "most precious, heartwarming, and practical of all of our theological beliefs."<sup>2</sup>

Concerning this topic, Reformed luminary J. I. Packer famously wrote,

You sum up the whole of the 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 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 distinctly Christian as

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Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 545.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Duguid, "The Family of God," *Tabletalk*, March 2007, 8.

opposed to merely Jewish, is summed up in the knowledge of the fatherhood of God. “Father” is the Christian name for God.<sup>3</sup>

## Some Preliminary Matters

Adoption is *Trinitarian* in nature. God the Father from before the foundation of the world predestined those who would be adopted into His family (Eph 1:3-5). God the Son purchased and earned this right for them through His sacrificial death on the cross (Eph 1:7; Gal 4:4-5). And God the Holy Spirit gives them the filial privileges as sons, by giving them the nature of sons, through regeneration (Eze 36:27; Joh 3:3-8; Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6; Ti 3:5).

Adoption is a *Pauline* doctrine. While other authors refer to our sonship, such as the Apostle John (cf. Joh 1:12-13; 1Jo 3:1), it is only Paul who actually uses this term. He uses it in five places (Rom 8:15, 23, 9:4;<sup>4</sup> Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). For the apostle, the word *adop-*

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<sup>3</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 182. Of course, this understanding of adoption does not deny the fact that there were Old Testament believers, saints who savingly knew God as Father through faith in Jesus the coming Messiah (Psa 89:26; Isa 63:16; 64:8). They knew Him this way, not because of natural generation from Abraham, but because of spiritual regeneration by God, for there was a truly saved Israel within Israel (Rom 9:6-8).

<sup>4</sup> In this passage Paul refers to national Israel as receiving “the adoption.” In the Old Testament, the Israelites are described as God’s sons in some passages (Exo 4:22; Deu 14:1; Isa 1:2). However, in Romans 9:4, he is not speaking about spiritual adoption since not everyone in the entire nation was God’s spiritual child. Spiritual adoption only happens when one receives Christ the Messiah by

tion symbolized “God’s love and grace in accepting believers as His children, intimate members of His family.”<sup>5</sup>

Adoption is rooted in *Roman custom*.<sup>6</sup> Scholars are almost unanimously agreed on this. In Paul’s day, in the context of the Roman Empire, a person could become a son to a father by the father adopting the son into his family, who was not his son by natural procreation. When this happened, it “secured for the adopted

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faith alone, which many Old Testament Jews did, but not the nation as a whole (Joh 1:11-13; Rom 4:1-8; 11:1-5). Paul, then, in Romans 9:4, is referring to that theocratic adoption of the Israelites as a nation which set them apart as God’s own from all the other people groups of the world. In commenting on this matter, Dr. Sam Waldron writes, “Thus, implicitly in Romans 9:4 and explicitly in John 1:11-13, there is a clear contrast between the typical sonship of the Old Testament and the real, substantial and anti-typical sonship conferred by the New Covenant.” Sam Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1989), 167. Further, Paul’s language here of the adoption of Israel, points forward to the adoption of the true Israel, namely, the church of Jesus Christ, which is made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers.

<sup>5</sup> Trent C. Butler, ed., *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, Tenn.: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 20.

<sup>6</sup> While there were examples of people being adopted into families in the Old Testament, such as Moses (Exo 2:10), and Esther (Est 2:7), scholars tell us that adoption was not formally part of Jewish law. Further, while there are examples of adoption coming out of Greek background, Harold Hoehner rightly says, “It is highly improbable that the people of the first century A.D. would be following Greek law when the Romans had overtaken the Greek territory more than a century ago. Hence, it is implausible that Paul relied on the Greek law and customs in his use of *huiothesia*, for in all five instances he was addressing people who lived under Roman law.” (Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002, 195)

child a right to the name and the property of the person by whom he had been adopted.”<sup>7</sup> When this occurred, “it carried no stigma; on the contrary, it was special to have been adopted. It meant that someone important had set his love upon you and adopted you to be his son, his heir.”<sup>8</sup>

Adoption is a *separate element* in our salvation. Sadly, some theologians have not stressed this point enough in their treatments of this subject, making adoption to be merely the positive side of justification, but not a standalone topic. However, while the two matters are connected (along with the subject of regeneration), the biblical definitions of each are not the same and should be treated distinctly. John Murray astutely notes,

Justification means our acceptance with God as righteous and the bestowal of the title to everlasting life. Regeneration is the renewing of our hearts after the image of God. But these blessings in themselves, however precious they are, do not indicate what is conferred by the act of adoption. By adoption the redeemed become the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God’s family.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God’s Ultimate Purpose: An Exposition of Ephesians 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 109.

<sup>8</sup> Richard D. Phillips, “The Good News of Adoption,” in *Reclaiming Adoption*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, Md.: Cruciform Press, 2011), 60.

<sup>9</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (1955; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 139.



Adoption is *eschatological* in its expectation. While it is true that adoption pertains to our lives in the here and now, we must never forget that the New Testament also points forward to a fuller and final adoption with our resurrection unto glory. This is what we might call our consummated adoption, which Paul says, causes us, who are God's children, to groan "within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom 8:23). This ultimate aspect of our adoption, of our resurrected, glorified bodies at Christ's return, will "signal our final and full status as the sons of God manifested before all creation"<sup>10</sup> (Rom 8:17-18; Phi 3:20-21; 1Jo 3:1-3).

## The Definition of Adoption

The English term *adoption* derives from the Latin *adoptio* (from *ad*, "to" and *apto*, "choose").<sup>11</sup> The Greek word for adoption (*huiothesia*) is made up of two Greek words and literally means "to place as a son" or "to put in the position of a son," hence, "to adopt a son," or "to give one the status of a son." Fundamentally, the word describes the supernatural change of relationship that happens to Christians in salvation from being slaves of sin to the legal and loved sons and daughters of the living God, which takes place at the moment of conversion by faith (Joh 1:12; Gal 3:26; 4:3-7).<sup>12</sup> Other definitions concerning adoption abound.

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<sup>10</sup> W. R. Downing, *A Baptist Catechism with Commentary* (Morgan Hill, Calif.: PIRS Publications, 2000), 182.

<sup>11</sup> Downing, *A Baptist Catechism*, 181.

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that contrary to an early heresy in church history known as Adoptionism, the term adoption is never used

The Westminster divines wrote in the Shorter Catechism about this subject.<sup>13</sup> In Question 34, they say, “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.”<sup>14</sup>

Dutch Reformed theologian Wilhelmus À Brakel said, “The manner in which believers are children of God is by way of adoption as children.”<sup>15</sup> Charles Spurgeon, the well-known Reformed Baptist preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, said, “Adoption is that act of God, whereby men who were by nature the children of wrath, even as others, and were of the lost and ruined family of Adam, are from no reason in themselves, but entirely of the pure grace of God, translated out of the

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of Christ even though He is God’s Son. This is because He has always been the Son of God by nature, being equal in substance, power, and eternity with God the Father and God the Spirit. Additionally, it is vital to note that while the apostle Paul calls unsaved people “the offspring of God” (Act 17:29), the reference here is to them being *creations* of God, not *children* of God (Mal 2:10a). Becoming a child of God only happens when one puts personal faith in Christ alone for salvation. As Paul says in Galatians 3:26, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.” Along these lines, John Murray wisely notes, “To substitute the message of God’s universal fatherhood for that which is constituted by redemption and adoption is to annul the gospel.” (Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 143; cf. Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, 166)

<sup>13</sup> They also addressed this matter in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* (Q. 74).

<sup>14</sup> As to how much the Puritans spoke about the subject, see Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 537-538.

<sup>15</sup> Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 2:416.

evil...family of Satan and brought actually and virtually into the family of God.”<sup>16</sup>

The Puritan Baptists writing in the *London Baptist Confession of Faith*<sup>17</sup> write four things about this topic:

## The Recipients of Adoption

The writers of the Confession describe those who are adopted by God as “all those that are justified.” This is important to understand because while justification and adoption are separate doctrines, as previously mentioned (the former being a legal blessing of salvation, the latter being filial), they are always linked. The point is, all whom God declares “not guilty” and imputes to them “the righteousness of Christ” (justification) become a son or daughter of the living God (adoption). Simply stated, there is not a justified person in all the world who does not receive the tremendous blessing of being brought into God’s family. In fact, just as justification is a one-time, immediate, and permanent act, so also is adoption. Hence, John Murray aptly remarks, “The person who is justified is always the recipient of sonship.”<sup>18</sup>

He writes:

Adoption is, like justification, a judicial act. In other words, it is the bestowal of a status, or

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<sup>16</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “An Act of Pure Grace,” *Free Grace Broadcaster* #246, Adoption: 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> The parallel statement in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 12, is almost identical.

<sup>18</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 140.

standing, not the generating within us of a new nature or character.<sup>19</sup>

Dr. Joel Beeke further observes,

Justification is the primary, fundamental blessing of the gospel; it meets our most basic spiritual need—forgiveness and reconciliation with God. We could not be adopted without it. But adoption is a richer blessing, because it brings us from the courtroom into the family. “Justification is conceived of in terms of law, adoption in terms of love. Justification sees God as judge, adoption as a father.”<sup>20</sup>

## The Author of Adoption

God the Father is the Author of adoption. It is He Who, as the Confession states, “vouchsafed” or graciously granted that we would receive this spiritual blessing. In love, He predestined us or literally “marked us off in advance” for adoption as sons (Eph 1:3-6). In His rich mercies, He ordained that believers would be taken out of the fallen mass of mankind who were headed to hell, and be brought safely into His redeemed, spiritual family on the earth. This was His eternal choice concerning us. For the great I AM said about us, “And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2Co 6:18). When such a grand truth is set against our great rebellion toward the Almighty, it is astounding.

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<sup>19</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 140.

<sup>20</sup> Joel R. Beeke, *Heirs with Christ: The Puritans on Adoption* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), 28.

Who can fully comprehend it? Scotty Smith warmly comments,

Of all the magnificent riches of the gospel, none is more to be treasured and pondered than our adoption in Christ. When the Father lavished His love upon us and made us His children, we weren't just street-wandering orphans looking for a good meal and a warm bed. We were self-absorbed slaves to sin and death. Indeed, we weren't in the orphanage of loneliness; we were in the morgue of hopelessness. Adoption, therefore, is the quintessential freedom for which we long, and for which we've been redeemed.<sup>21</sup>

## The Mediator of Adoption

Jesus Christ is the sole Mediator of our adoption (Eph 1:5; Gal 4:4-5). The framers of the Confession say this unequivocally when they write that our becoming the supernaturally born children of God was “in and for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ.” By saying, firstly, that this was done “in...his only Son Jesus Christ,” the authors show us that they clearly understood that everything we receive as Christians comes to us, not by a natural connection with Abraham or Moses, but exclusively through a spiritual connection with Christ. Richard Muller says,

The concept of *adoptio*, therefore, also rests upon the Reformed teaching of the *unio mystica*, or mystical union with Christ: graciously united with

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<sup>21</sup> Scotty Smith, “The Freedom of Adoption,” in *Reclaiming Adoption*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, Md.: Cruciform Press, 2011), 69.

Christ, Who is Son of God by nature, believers are made sons of God by grace.<sup>22</sup>

Dan Cruver further comments,

Paul is revealing that adoption was not given to us *apart from* or *in isolation from* Jesus. Nor was it given to us *in addition to* Jesus. Rather, adoption is nothing less than *the placement of sons in the Son*. These two concepts—adoption unto the Father, and being in Christ—are so necessarily joined to one another as to be inseparable.<sup>23</sup>

The Confession teaches that Jesus is the exclusive source for how we, who are joined to Him by faith alone, become the children of God. For it is only in union with Him, Who is the Beloved of God, that we are accepted before God (Eph 1:6b). All of this is based not on our works, but completely on the sinless life and substitutionary, sin-bearing work of Jesus on our behalf. Consequently, adoption has only one ground—the person and work of Christ. Paul says this explicitly in Ephesians 1:5, when he writes that we have been predestined to adoption as sons “by Jesus Christ.”<sup>24</sup> This prepositional phrase can be rendered as “through (*dia*) Jesus Christ,” and its use in this verse with the

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<sup>22</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 27.

<sup>23</sup> Dan Cruver, “Adoption and Our Union with Christ,” in *Reclaiming Adoption*, ed. Dan Cruver (Adelphi, Md.: Cruciform Press, 2011), 51.

<sup>24</sup> In commenting on this verse, Clint Arnold helpfully says, “The final purpose of election is then relational. God is bringing together people whom He can delight in and enjoy.” (Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010, 83)

genitive case sets forth Christ as the divine agent through Whom our adoption is effected. This is so, because Jesus came to “redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:5).

Dr. Sam Waldron correctly notes,

The whole story of the Bible is the story of how mankind’s original, filial relationship with God as their father is restored through the work of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the authors say that God ordained our adoption “for the sake of his only Son Jesus Christ.” I take this language to mean that our being adopted into God’s family was not only for our sake, but for Christ’s also.<sup>26</sup> In fulfillment of what is commonly called “the covenant of redemption,” Christ will see the salvation of His spiritual seed for whom He died and they will be given to Him as spoil (Isa 53:10, 12; Joh 6:37-39). He will see the “travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (Isa 53:11, cf. Heb 2:11-13). The late Dr. R. C. Sproul put it well when he said,

It is through the grace of God that we are brought into the family of God through adoption. And we, in turn, are the Father’s gift to the Son. From all eternity, the Father and the Son were in agreement in this enterprise, and so the Father was pleased to give us to the Son, and the Son was

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<sup>25</sup> Waldron, *A Modern Exposition of Confession of the 1689 Baptist Confession*, 166.

<sup>26</sup> R. C. Sproul says something similar in *Truths We Confess: A Systematic Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*, rev. ed. (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust, 2019), 285.

pleased to receive us from the Father. The Son was so pleased about this gift that He laid down His life for us while we were still His enemies, so that we might be His brothers and sisters.<sup>27</sup>

## **The Blessings of Adoption**

### ***1. We are received into the family of God***

The Confession says that we are made partakers “of the grace of” or, the undeserved mercy of adoption, by which we are “taken into the number.” This means that our Father Who is in heaven “cuts us off from the family to which we naturally belong in Adam as children of wrath and of the devil and grafts us into His own family to make us members of the covenant family of God.”<sup>28</sup> It means that we who were once “not a people” are “now the people of God” (1Pe 2:10), since He has delivered us “from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13).

### ***2. We are privileged as the children of God***

The writers say that we “enjoy the liberties and privileges of the children of God.”<sup>29</sup> Then they put forth four of these liberties and privileges:

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<sup>27</sup> Sproul, *Truths We Confess*, 285.

<sup>28</sup> Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 548.

<sup>29</sup> Joh 1:12; Rom 8:17.



### **a. God's name upon us**

First, believers “have his name put upon them.”<sup>30</sup> This speaks about ownership. It speaks about possession, as when a stranger is “taken into the family of another, [they] receive the name of the adopter, and those whom God adopts are called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord hath named” (Isa 62:2).<sup>31</sup> The point is, Christians now belong to God forevermore. He Himself has marked us out to be His very own cherished ones in Christ. Further, it means that we are no longer our own apart from Him, for our new identity is now in Christ. Our identity is Christian (Act 11:26; 26:28). Consequently, Thomas Boston says, “Our old name is forever laid aside.”<sup>32</sup>

### **b. The Spirit of adoption**

Second, believers “receive the spirit of adoption,”<sup>33</sup> or the Spirit Who testifies to our spirit, that we are the adopted children of God, which Spirit is the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> The Puritan Samuel Willard said it best when he wrote that the Holy Spirit “ratifies our sonship to be immutable, and confirms our title to all the promises irreversibly. As such a Spirit, He gives His testimony in us, to ratify all our evidences, and fully assure us of our sonship and heirship.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> 2Co 6:18; Rev 3:12.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Confession of Faith* (Ross-shire: Scotland: Christian Focus, 1973), 139.

<sup>32</sup> Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 548.

<sup>33</sup> Rom 8:15, 16.

<sup>34</sup> John Murray, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 296.

<sup>35</sup> Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 548.

### c. Access with boldness

Third, believers “have access to the throne of grace with boldness.”<sup>36</sup> This means that the way to God for believers is no longer barred. Rather, we can draw near to Him with great joy and make our requests known to Him because of Jesus’s atoning work on our behalf. It means that God’s throne is no longer a condemning throne of judgment for us, but one of complete grace. Thus, we can confidently come before Him through Christ, without any fear. John Owen, the great Puritan, affectionately writes, “There is with God in Christ, God on His throne of grace, a spring of suitable and seasonable help for all times and occasions of difficulty. He is ‘the God of all grace,’ and a fountain of living waters is with Him for the refreshment of every weary and thirsty soul.”<sup>37</sup>

### d. Enabled to cry *Abba*, Father

Fourth, believers “are enabled to cry *Abba*, Father,”<sup>38</sup> which cry is the result of the Spirit of God in our hearts, for He “not only bestows ‘adoption’ on us; he also makes us aware of this new relationship.”<sup>39</sup> Martin Luther’s observations on the believer’s use of the word *Abba* are tenderly put:

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<sup>36</sup> Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12; Heb 4:16.

<sup>37</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 4:437.

<sup>38</sup> Mat 6:9; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6; Eph 2:18. Scholars tell us that the sense of the word is that of intimacy or endearment. It is the cry of one saying to God, “My dear Father.”

<sup>39</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 502.

This is but a little word, and yet notwithstanding it comprehendeth all things. The mouth speaketh not, but the affection of the heart speaketh after this manner: Although I be oppressed with anguish and terror on every side, and seemed to be forsaken and utterly cast away from Thy presence, yet I am Thy child, and Thou art my Father for Christ's sake: I am beloved because of the Beloved.<sup>40</sup>

### ***3. We are cared for as the redeemed of God***

Again, the writers state four examples, saying that God's adopted children are:

#### **a. Pitied**

This does not mean that God looks down upon us with disdain and despises us because of our pitiful condition before Him in and of ourselves. God forbid! Rather, it means that as our loving heavenly Father, He cares for us as "a father pitieth his children" (Psa 103:13; 1Pe 5:7). It means that with divine compassion, He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses for "he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust" (Psa 103:14). Jeremiah Burroughs writes, "God, Who is the infinite glorious first being, embraces them with an entirely fatherly love. All the love that ever was in any parents towards children, is but as one drop of the infinite ocean of fatherly love that there is in God unto His people."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cited in Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 503.

<sup>41</sup> Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 550.

## **b. Protected**

Second, God's adopted children are "protected,"<sup>42</sup> which means that God is always a shield and refuge for His people. He is our mighty fortress, a bulwark never failing. He defends us from the assaults of the world, the flesh, and the devil. In the words of Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Regarding this Psalm, it is said of Luther that there were times in his life which were so dark and dangerous, that when he fell into discouragement he would turn to his close friend and coworker Philip Melancthon and say, "Come Philip, let's sing the forty-sixth Psalm."<sup>43</sup>

## **c. Provided for**

Third, God's adopted children are "provided for."<sup>44</sup> God knows our needs. He knows them even before we ask (Mat 6:8). And knowing our needs, He graciously supplies them (Mat 6:25-32). King David well understood this and said, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psa 37:25). Matthew Henry expounds,

Your heavenly Father knows ye have need of all these things—these necessary things, food and raiment. He knows our wants better than we do ourselves. Though He be in heaven, and His children on earth, He observes what the least and poorest of them has occasion for. You think, if

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<sup>42</sup> Pro 14:26; 18:10.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 2:388.

<sup>44</sup> Psa 34:10; Mat 6:30-32; 1Pe 5:7.

such a good friend did not but know your wants and straits, you would soon have relief. Your God knows them! And He is your Father that loves you and pities you, and is ready to help you.<sup>45</sup>

#### **d. Chastened**

Fourth, God's adopted children are "chastened by him as by a Father,"<sup>46</sup> which according to the Bible is a benefit to us, for "God's corrections are our instructions, His lashes our lessons, His scourges our schoolmaster."<sup>47</sup> While God punishes His enemies, He only chastens His children. He does this in love, when we sin, not to break us, but to make us more like Christ, so that "we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb 12:10). Therefore, His chastenings are "badges of our sonship and of the Father's love" (Heb 12:3-11).<sup>48</sup>

#### ***4. We are preserved by the power of God***<sup>49</sup>

God's adopted children are "yet never cast off,<sup>50</sup> but sealed<sup>51</sup> to the day of redemption."<sup>52</sup> This means that although God disciplines us, He never disowns us (Phi 1:6; Heb 13:5; Jud 1:24). It means that although

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 5:69.

<sup>46</sup> Heb 12:6.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Brooks, quoted in *The Complete Gathered Gold*, comp. John Blanchard (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 68.

<sup>48</sup> Beeke and Jones, *Puritan Theology*, 549.

<sup>49</sup> For a further exposition of this matter, see chapter 17 of *The London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, "Of The Perseverance of the Saints.

<sup>50</sup> Isa 54:8; Lam 3:31.

<sup>51</sup> Eph 1:13.

<sup>52</sup> Eph 4:30; Heb 13:5; 1Pe 1:5; Jud 1:24.

we must face many tribulations as we enter the kingdom of God (Act 14:22), as God's adopted children we are eternally secure in the Savior until glory by His eternal decree, seeing that the "gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29). Thomas Watson wisely remarks, "God's decree is the very pillar and basis on which the saints' perseverance depends. That decree ties the knot of adoption so fast that neither sin, death, nor hell can break it asunder."<sup>53</sup>

### ***5. We are graced with the promises of God***

God's adopted children also "inherit the promises as heirs of everlasting salvation."<sup>54</sup> This means that as God's children, we have much to look forward to. Our eternal prospects are extremely bright<sup>55</sup> and this is because all of His promises which are "exceedingly great and precious,"<sup>56</sup> are His "storehouse of blessings and a chest of goodwill" toward us.<sup>57</sup> They are "yea, and in him Amen,"<sup>58</sup> which means they will certainly come to pass, seeing that "God never promises more than He is able to perform."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, since the Lord "is not a man, that he should lie" (Num 23:19), William Gurnall helpfully counsels us and says, "The wise Christian will

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<sup>53</sup> Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 172.

<sup>54</sup> Heb 1:14; 6:12; 9:15; 10:36; 1Pe 1:3-4.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. 1Co 2:9.

<sup>56</sup> 2Pe 1:4.

<sup>57</sup> Joel R. Beeke and James A. LaBelle, *Living by God's Promises* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 2.

<sup>58</sup> 2Co 1:20.

<sup>59</sup> Matthew Henry, quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 510.

store himself with promises in health for sickness, and in peace for future perils.”<sup>60</sup>

## The Applications of Adoption

Following the reality of the privileges and promises we have as children of God, there are several principles we must apply if we would grow in greater awareness of our adoption as God’s children:

1. We must regularly *reflect* on this stunning teaching of Scripture and all that it means for us personally.

2. We must regularly *recall* what our new identity is as adopted sons or daughters of God and live in light of it.

3. We must regularly *resolve* to love all the true people of God, who like us have been adopted by God.

4. We must regularly *reject* the ways of the world, which belong to the children of the devil.

5. We must regularly *reach out* to God in prayer, knowing that His ears are always open to our petitions.

6. We must regularly *rejoice*, knowing that what awaits us in the eternal state is truly wonderful.

## Conclusion

Adoption is a glorious doctrine! It is also a gracious doctrine which tells us that although we do not

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew Henry, quoted in Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold*, 510.

deserve it, God, in unspeakable love and mercy, has made us members of His family. In His unfathomable kindness and grace, He has bestowed upon us the great honor and status of sons and daughters. Thus, I agree with Packer again, when he said that, “The revelation to the believer that God is his Father is in a sense the climax of the Bible.”<sup>61</sup> John Murray concurs when he says that this teaching is “surely the apex of grace and privilege.”<sup>62</sup> Therefore, may the astonishing nature of this grand theme continually fill our hearts and minds with great joy and praise. May it consume all of our thoughts so that we can happily and habitually say with the Apostle John,

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God (1Jo 3:1).



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<sup>61</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 182.

<sup>62</sup> Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 134.