

Free Grace Broadcaster

ISSUE 246

ADOPTION

*Having predestinated us unto
the adoption of children by
Jesus Christ to himself.*

Ephesians 1:5

Our Purpose

*“To humble the pride of man,
to exalt the grace of God in salvation,
and to promote real holiness in heart and life.”*

Free Grace Broadcaster

ADOPTION

246

Contents

The Importance of Adoption	1
<i>Robert Alexander Webb (1856-1919)</i>	
An Act of Pure Grace	6
<i>Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)</i>	
The Causes of Adoption	12
<i>John Gill (1697-1771)</i>	
The Fatherhood of God	15
<i>John Murray (1898-1975)</i>	
Grace Reigns in Adoption	19
<i>Abraham Booth (1734-1806)</i>	
Nature and Benefits of Adoption	25
<i>David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)</i>	
From Satan's Family to God's	30
<i>John Dick (1764-1833)</i>	
The Witness of the Spirit	35
<i>Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)</i>	
We Shall Be Like Him	39
<i>John Eadie (1810-1876)</i>	
Sacred Evidence of Sonship	44
<i>Thomas Reade (1776-1841)</i>	

Published by Chapel Library • 2603 West Wright St. • Pensacola, Florida 32505 USA

Sending Christ-centered materials from prior centuries worldwide

Worldwide: please use the online downloads worldwide without charge, www.chapellibrary.org.

In North America: please write for your free subscription in print. The FGB is sent quarterly without charge. Chapel Library is a faith ministry that relies upon God's faithfulness. We seek His glory in all things, depending upon Him to supply our needs through those who freely desire to give and pray. We therefore do not solicit donations; you will only hear from us when you request materials or receive your subscription. We also do not share our mailing list, so your contact information will remain secure with us. Chapel Library does not necessarily agree with all the doctrinal views of the authors it publishes.

© Copyright 2018 Chapel Library: compilation, abridgment, annotations

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOPTION

Robert Alexander Webb (1856-1919)

THE evangelical doctrine of adoption—succinctly described as “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”¹—has received but slender treatment at the hands of theologians. It has been handled with a meagerness entirely out of proportion to its intrinsic importance and with a subordination that allows it only a parenthetical place in the system of evangelical truth. I know of no monograph² on this subject, which devotes itself to the articulation and development of this great doctrine of grace, parallel in fullness and thoroughness with the way the coordinate doctrine of justification³ has been expounded and set forth. Of those great treatises, which professedly cover the entire field of evangelical doctrine, many of them omit this topic altogether, as if it had no existence whatever; others give to it but a few incidental and passing observations, while none of them articulate it as a separate head in divinity.

Calvin,⁴ for example, makes no allusion whatever to adoption,⁵ while Turretin⁶ identifies it with the second element of justification—the acceptance of the person—and sinks it well-nigh out of sight in his discussion of this great topic of soteriology⁷...Of the great creeds of Christendom, none of them contains a chapter or formal article on adoption, except the Westminster Confession,⁸ which devotes its

¹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism* Q. 34; *Spurgeon’s Catechism* Q. 33.

² **monograph** – treatise, book, or paper written on one particular subject or branch of it.

³ **justification** – Justification is an act of God’s free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone. (*Spurgeon’s Catechism*, Q. 32) see FGB 187, *Justification*, both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁴ **John Calvin (1509-1564)** – French-born Genevan Protestant reformer.

⁵ Calvin did not provide a separate section on adoption in his *Institutes* but argues in Book III.25.3 that if Christ did not rise from the dead, “the authority of the gospel would fail, not in one part merely, but in its very essence, including both our adoption and the accomplishment of our salvation.” The “Argument” of his commentary on Ephesians speaks of “a striking display of God’s wonderful mercy, when the salvation of men is traced to its true and native source, the free act of adoption.” The Fatherhood of God permeated Calvin’s theology.

⁶ **Frances Turretin (1623-1687)** – Italian-born Genevan Reformed theologian.

⁷ **soteriology** – branch of Christian theology regarding the doctrine of salvation.

⁸ The Savoy Declaration of 1658, Second London Baptist Confession of 1677/89, and Philadelphia Confession of Faith also contain Chapter 12 on adoption.

twelfth chapter to this subject. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God, as manifested towards believers in providence and in grace, appears incidentally in several of these creeds; and corresponding expressions describing believers as the children of God are to be found in several of these doctrinal formularies.⁹ The Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 33) teaches “that Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted by God, by grace, for His sake.” The Thirty-Nine Articles [of Anglicanism] (XVII) declare that the elect, in addition to their being called and justified, are “made sons of God by adoption.” But in the Westminster Confession, we have the grace of adoption formally set forth as one of the benefits of Christ’s mediation, co-ordinate with justification and sanctification, and a particular account of the privileges and blessings that flow from it. As a separate head in theology, worthy of distinct articulation and development, adoption is set forth in both Westminster Catechisms.

There are reasons, founded upon truth and fact, which not only warrant but fairly demand that adoption shall be signalized and developed as a distinctive and precious article of the Christian faith.

It is a *Biblical term* and connotes a *Biblical idea*. The Spirit was not trifling when He inspired its use as one of the verbal symbols through which He would communicate the mind of God to man. The apostle defines it as the very goal of the gracious purpose of God concerning sinners: “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:5). He tells us that it was the very blessing that God aimed to secure when, in the fulness of time, He sent forth His Son into the world “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:5). As the Israelites were chosen from among all the nations of the earth and adopted into the family of God as the highest distinction and privilege that could be conferred upon them, so to the true and spiritual Israel “pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom 9:4). And the Scriptures represent the whole created universe as groaning and travailing in pain, agonizing in expectation of some impending event, to wit, “the manifestation of the sons of God” through “the Spirit of adoption” (Rom 8:14-23).

A doctrine, then, that stands so intimately and fundamentally related to predestination, to the atonement, to spiritual life, and to the consummation and perfection of the entire universe, possesses a Biblical importance that renders it improper for theology to [ignore] it

⁹ **formularies** – writings containing stated and prescribed forms of doctrine.

altogether or to depress it to a subordinate and parenthetical place in the scheme of saving truth. There is a sense in which it is to be the crown and glory of the entire redemptive process. The admission of sinful men through the grace of adoption into the family of God with all the rights and privileges of sons in His house is, in a lofty sense, the culmination¹⁰ and climax of the blessings of redemption.

The *intrinsic preciousness* of the paternal¹¹ relation of God to His people and their corresponding filial relation to Him creates a very high claim for adoption. The Bible does reveal God as the “Father” of His people and proclaims Christians to be the children of God; and in the evangelical system, [adoption] has ever been pointed to as one of the most attractive and inspiring features of the gospel. The conception¹² of God as Father is the most charming and transporting thought that ever enters the bosom of man; and the correlative conception¹³ of himself as the son of God is the most soothing and satisfying thought that a sinner ever finds himself indulging concerning himself. Philip said to our Lord, “Show us the Father, and it sufficeth us¹⁴” (Joh 14:8). It would satisfy Philip, it would satisfy any man, if he could grasp in consciousness and realize in experience that God was his Father.

When we approach Him in the intensity of worship, we gather up all the sweetness involved in fatherhood and all the tenderness enwrapped in sonship. When calamities overcome us and troubles come in like a flood, we lift our cry and stretch out our arms to God as a compassionate Father. When the angel of death climbs in at the window of our homes and bears away the object of our love, we find our dearest [comfort] in reflecting upon the fatherly heart of God. When we look across the swelling flood, it is our Father’s house on the light-covered hills beyond the stars that cheers us amid the crumbling of the earthly tabernacle. The paternity of God, the filiation¹⁵ of believers, the fraternity of all the saints, the household of faith, the family of God in heaven and earth, make a circle of domestic ideas that the Christian values above all the gold of Egypt, above all the gold of the world.

But it is by the grace of adoption that any sinner comes into all this glorious heritage of paternal affection and filial privilege. To bring man back as a disobedient subject and reinstate him in heavenly citi-

¹⁰ **culmination** – highest point; final climactic stage.

¹¹ **paternal** – fatherly.

¹² **conception** – idea.

¹³ **correlative conception** – mutually related idea.

¹⁴ **it sufficeth us** – it is enough for us; we will be satisfied.

¹⁵ **filiation** – relation of son or daughter to a father; adoption.

zenship, to confer upon him the immunities and duties of a servant, and to let him take his place as a ministering spirit about the burning throne of God would be an exhibition of grace worthy of immortal doxologies.¹⁶ But grace is heaped upon grace, mercy is banked upon mercy, and love is laid over upon love with more than a ten-fold thickness, when the sinner is reclaimed and transplanted in the bosom of the heavenly Father, made [a member] in the eternal and fadeless home of God, and appointed an heir to all the glory that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fades not away (1Pe 1:4). One would seem compelled to say, as a matter of course, adoption ought to be singled out and given conspicuous consideration in any system of evangelical truth.

Adoption deserves to be magnified because of the distinctive office that it performs in the scheme of saving grace. Man began his career as, at once, the subject and the son of God (Luk 3:38)—a member of the divine kingdom on the one hand and a member of the divine household on the other. At the beginning, God stood related to His human creature as his Lord and Ruler, as well as his Father and Friend. In both relations, man was put upon probation:¹⁷ his standing in God's paternal regard was tested at the same time and in the same manner in which his standing in God's magisterial¹⁸ favor was put upon trial. In both relations, he sinned and fell at the same time: at once, he lost his standing in God's rectoral¹⁹ regard as a citizen of His kingdom and his standing in God's paternal affection as a son in His house. After the fall, the sinner's status is precisely that of a proscribed²⁰ and outlawed citizen of the kingdom and a banished and disinherited son of the house of God.

Today he is under the scowl of God as righteous Judge and under the frown of God as a benevolent Father. The superlative desideratum²¹ for him is restoration in both relations: restoration to his position in the kingdom of God as a legal citizen with all the rights and privileges of citizenship, and restoration to the fatherly bosom of God with all the rights and privileges of sonship in His house and home. The momentous practical question that confronts him is, "How can lost citizenship be recovered on one hand, and how can lost sonship be regained on the other hand?" To this double question the gospel specif-

¹⁶ **doxologies** – utterances of praise to God.

¹⁷ **probation** – testing in order to prove one's character; in this case, Adam in the Garden.

¹⁸ **magisterial** – legal.

¹⁹ **rectoral** – relating to God as governor or ruler of men.

²⁰ **proscribed** – condemned.

²¹ **superlative desideratum** – greatest necessity.

ically speaks and makes the answer that everlastingly and gloriously solves this double problem. It points to justification as that act of grace, which terminating upon the condemned and outcast citizen, reinstates him in the favor of God as [his] Lord and Master, and to adoption as that parallel act of grace that, terminating upon the expelled and discarded son, restores him to the fatherly bosom of God as his Father and Friend. It is the office of the evangelical grace of justification to restore to the sinner the lost citizenship, and it is the office of adoption to give back to the sinner his lost sonship. Justification is that act of grace whereby we sinful subjects of God's government are received into the number of and given a right and title to all the privileges of the kingdom of God. Adoption is that act of grace, whereby we fallen sinners are received into the number of and are given all the rights and privileges of the sons of God. The one terminates upon the servile²² relation; the other terminates upon the filial relation. The one restores to *citizenship*, the other to *sonship*.

In the fall [of Adam], the sinner not only lost the rights and the footing of a child, but he also lost the heart and the spirit of a child. That is, he lost at once his filial position and his filial nature. He now stands in need of some scheme for regaining both—his filial status and his filial spirit. Regeneration²³ is that act of saving grace that, at least incipiently,²⁴ reimparts to him his lost filial disposition, while adoption is that act of grace that restores to him his filial standing. By the one, he is given the heart of a child; by the other, he is given the rights of a child. Both are unspeakably important—to have sonship as a law-right and prerogative on the one hand, and to have an appropriate filial disposition to correspond to the legal filial status.

So, while adoption coincides with justification at one point and with regeneration at another...it is eminently helpful in the comprehension of the scheme of salvation to treat adoption as a separate article of the Christian faith.

From *The Reformed Doctrine of Adoption*, Sprinkle Publications,
www.sprinklepublications.net.

Robert Alexander Webb (1856-1919): Presbyterian theologian and pastor; born in Oxford, Mississippi, USA.



²² **servile** – servant.

²³ **regeneration** – God's act of creating new life in a sinner by the Holy Spirit, resulting in repentance and faith in Christ and holiness of life. See FGB 202, *The New Birth*.

²⁴ **incipiently** – beginning to develop.

AN ACT OF PURE GRACE

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892)

Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.—Ephesians 1:5

IT is at once a doctrine of Scripture and of common sense that whatever God does in time, He predestined¹ to do in eternity. Some men find fault with divine predestination and challenge the justice of eternal decrees.² Now, if they will please to remember that predestination is the counterfoil³ of history, as an architectural plan, the carrying out of which we read in the facts that happen, they may perhaps obtain a slight clue to the unreasonableness of their hostility.

I never heard anyone among [professing believers] wantonly⁴ and willfully find fault with God's dealings, yet I have heard some who would even dare to call in question the equity⁵ of His counsels.⁶ If the thing itself be right, it must be right that God intended to do the thing. If you find no fault with facts as you see them in providence, you have no ground to complain of decrees as you find them in predestination; for the decrees and the facts are just the counterparts one of the other. Have you any reason to find fault with God—that He has been pleased to save you and save me? Then why should you find fault because Scripture says He predetermined that He would save

¹ **predestined/predestination** – from the Latin *praedestinatio*: *prae* = “before” and *destinare* = “to ordain”; in the broad sense, God's prior appointment of all people, things, and events that happen; in the narrower sense, God's eternal purpose of choosing some sinners to gracious salvation and leaving others to just condemnation.

² See FGBs 236, *God's Eternal Purpose*; 237, *God's Decrees*; and 238, *God's Love*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

³ **counterfoil** – part of a check that is kept as a record by the person who wrote it.

⁴ **wantonly** – recklessly; without proper motive.

⁵ **equity** – fairness.

⁶ **His counsels** – Differing views exist among those who believe in God's eternal purpose of salvation through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Some believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in (1) a Covenant of Redemption that was made in eternity among the members of the Godhead, which is the foundation for (2) a Covenant of Grace that is made in history between God and His elect (i.e., John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Charles Hodge, R. L. Dabney, David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Nehemiah Coxe, etc.). Of those who hold this view, some believe that it is between the Father and the Son, while others include the Holy Spirit. However, others believe that God's plan of salvation is expressed in only one Covenant of Grace, which has an *eternal* aspect between the members of the Trinity and an *historical* aspect between God and His elect (i.e., Edmund Calamy, Thomas Boston, John Brown of Haddington, John Gill, Benjamin Keach, etc.).

us? I cannot see, if the fact itself is agreeable, why the decree should be objectionable. I can see no reason why you should find fault with God's foreordination,⁷ if you do not find fault with what does actually happen as the effect of it. Let a man but agree to acknowledge an act of providence, and I want to know how he can, except he runs in the very teeth of providence, find any fault with the predestination or intention that God made concerning that providence. Will you blame me for preaching this morning? Suppose you answer, No. Then can you blame me that I formed a resolution last night that I would preach? Will you blame me for preaching on this particular subject? Do, if you please, then, and find me guilty for intending to do so. But if you say I am perfectly right in selecting such a subject, how can you say I was not perfectly right in intending to preach upon it? Assuredly, you cannot find fault with God's predestination if you do not find fault with the effects that immediately spring from it.

Now, we are taught in Scripture, I affirm again, that all things that God choseth to do in time [He intended from eternity;] and He predestined such things should be done. If I am called, I believe God intended before all worlds that I should be called. If in His mercy He has regenerated me, I believe that from all eternity He intended to regenerate me. And if in His loving-kindness He shall at last perfect me and carry me to heaven, I believe it always was His intention to do so. If you cannot find fault with the thing itself that God does, in the name of reason, common sense, and Scripture, how dare you find fault with God's intention to do it?

But there are one or two acts of God that, while they certainly are decreed as much as other things, yet they bear such a special relation to God's predestination that it is rather difficult to say whether they were done in eternity or whether they were done in time. Election is one of those things that was done absolutely in eternity; all who were elect, were elect as much in eternity as they are in time.

But you may say, "Does the like affirmation apply to adoption or justification?" My late, eminent, and now glorified predecessor, Dr. Gill,⁸ diligently studying these doctrines, said that adoption was the act of God in eternity and that as all believers were elect in eternity, so beyond a doubt they were adopted in eternity. He went further than that to include the doctrine of justification, and he said that since Jesus Christ was before all worlds justified by His Father and

⁷ **foreordination** – determination before creation.

⁸ **John Gill (1697-1771)** – Baptist minister, theologian, and author.

accepted by Him as our representative, therefore all the elect must have been justified in Christ from before all worlds. Now, I believe there is a great deal of truth in what he said, though there was a considerable outcry raised against him at the time he first uttered it.⁹

However, that being a high and mysterious point, we would have you accept the doctrine that all those who are saved at last were elect in eternity when the means as well the end were determined. Regarding adoption, I believe we were predestined thereunto in eternity; but I do think there are some points regarding adoption that will not allow me to consider the act of adoption to have been completed in eternity. For instance, the positive translation of my soul from a state of nature into a state of grace is a part of adoption, or at least it is an effect of it, and so close an effect that it really seems to be a part of adoption itself. I believe that this was designed and in fact that it was virtually carried out in God's everlasting covenant. But I think that it was not actually then brought to pass in all its fulness. So with regard to justification, I must hold, that in the moment when Jesus Christ paid my debts, my debts were cancelled—in the hour when He worked out for me a perfect righteousness, it was imputed to me; and therefore I may as a believer say I was complete in Christ before I was born, accepted in Jesus, even as Levi was blessed in the loins of Abraham by Melchisedec (Heb 7:5-10). But I know likewise that justification is described in the Scriptures as passing upon me at the time I believe. "Being justified by faith," I am told, "I have peace with God,

⁹ Spurgeon refers to Gill's views of adoption and justification in eternity, which have been debated since Gill published his *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. In fact, "Since the Reformation in the sixteenth century the question has been raised whether certain Reformed orthodox theologians believed that justification, as the act of God, was accomplished in eternity rather than in time" (Beeke, Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life*, 133). Gill, John Brine, Tobias Crisp, Herman Hoeksema, Abraham Kuyper, and others have held the doctrine of eternal justification. All Reformed theologians, including Gill, hold to God's decree in eternity and the outworking of that decree by the Holy Spirit in time; that is, they distinguish between God's eternal decree and its bestowal of grace on His people upon believing. Turretin exemplifies the common view: "The decree of justification is one thing; justification itself another—as the will to save and sanctify is one thing; salvation and sanctification itself another. The will or decree to justify certain persons is indeed eternal and precedes faith itself, but actual justification takes place in time and follows faith" (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, 683). But Gill concluded that since the elect are in union with Christ in eternity, they were justified and adopted in eternity *before* exercising faith. He taught that faith was the *evidence* of justification, while others taught that faith is the *instrument* of justification. Similarly, he taught that a person is not regenerated to be adopted but is regenerated *because* he was adopted in eternity. So, Spurgeon recognizes the tension between both points of view and attempts to harmonize them, admitting, "It requires much more time to study this subject than I have been able yet to give it."

through Jesus Christ.” I think, therefore, that adoption and justification, while they have a very great alliance with eternity and were virtually done then, yet have both of them such a near relation to us in time and such a bearing upon our own personal standing and character that they have also a part and parcel of themselves actually carried out and performed in time in the heart of every believer.

I may be wrong in this exposition: it requires much more time to study this subject than I have been able yet to give to it, seeing that my years are not yet many. I shall no doubt by degrees come to the knowledge more fully of such high and mysterious points of gospel doctrine. But nevertheless, while I find the majority of sound divines holding that the works of justification and adoption are done in our lives, I see in Scripture, on the other hand, much to lead me to believe that both of them were done in eternity; and I think the fairest view of the case is, that while they were virtually done in eternity, yet both adoption and justification are actually passed upon us in our proper persons, consciences, and experiences in time—so that both the Westminster confession and the idea of Dr. Gill can be proved to be Scriptural. We may hold them both without any prejudice the one to the other.¹⁰

Well now, beloved, leaving then predestination, let us come to...a consideration...of the doctrine of “the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will”...

First, adoption—the grace of it: 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,

¹⁰ Spurgeon highly prized Dr. Gill’s *Body of Divinity* and Calvin’s *Institutes* from his earliest years as a preacher; but at the age he preached this sermon (“seeing that my years are not yet many”), he apparently had not come to a settled view of the matter. As noted above, Reformed theologians agree regarding God’s eternal decree and its historical outworking in justification and adoption. However, Gill’s view, similar in some respects to William Twisse, Thomas Goodwin, William Ames, Herman Witsius, John Owen, and others, retains features more uniquely his. Wisely, Spurgeon said in a later sermon, “My venerable predecessor, Dr. Gill, has left a body of divinity, admirable and excellent in its way; but the body of divinity to which I would pin and bind myself forever, God helping me, is not his system of divinity or any other human treatise, but Christ Jesus, Who is the sum and substance of the gospel; Who is in Himself all theology, the incarnation of every precious truth, the all-glorious personal embodiment of the way, the truth, and the life.” For further reading on Gill’s views (pro and con), see J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 110-119; J. A. White, “A Theological and Historical Examination of John Gill’s Soteriology in Relation to Eighteenth-Century Hyper-Calvinism” (Ph.D. Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Curt Daniel, “Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983); George M. Ella, *John Gill and the Cause of God and Truth* (The Cairn, Hill Top, Eggleston, Co.: Go Publications, 1995).

but entirely of the pure grace of God, translated out of the evil and black family of Satan and brought actually and virtually into the family of God; so that they take His name, share the privileges of sons, and they are to all intents and purposes the actual offspring and children of God.

This is an act of pure grace. No man can ever have a right in himself to become adopted. If I had, then I should receive the inheritance in my own right—but inasmuch as I have no right whatever to be a child of God and can by no possibility claim so high a privilege in and of myself, adoption is the pure, gratuitous¹¹ effect of divine grace and of that alone...Above all contradiction and controversy, that great and glorious act whereby God makes us of His family and unites us to Jesus Christ as our covenant head so that we may be His children is an act of pure grace. It would have been an act of sovereign grace if God had adopted someone out of the best of families; but in this case, He has adopted one who was a child of a rebel [*Adam*]. We are by nature the children of one who was attainted¹² for high treason. We are all the heirs and are born into the world the natural heirs of one who sinned against his Maker, who was a rebel against his Lord. Yet mark this—withstanding the evil of our parentage, born of a thief who stole the fruit from his master's garden, born of a proud traitor who dared to rebel against his God—withstanding all, God has put us into the family. We can well conceive that when God considered our vile original,¹³ He might have said within Himself, “How can I put thee among the children?” With what gratitude should we remember that, though we were of the very lowest original, grace has put us into the number of the Savior's family...If a king should adopt any into his family, it would likely be the son of one of his lords—at any rate, some child of respectable parentage. He would scarce take the son of some common felon or some gypsy child to adopt him into his family; but God, in this case, has taken the very worst to be His children! The saints of God all confess that they are the last persons they should ever have dreamed He would have chosen...let us think not only of our original lineage,¹⁴ but of our personal character. He who knows himself will never think that he had much to recommend him to God.

In other cases of adoption, there usually is some recommendation. A man, when he adopts a child, sometimes is moved thereto by its extraordinary beauty or at other times by its intelligent manners and

¹¹ **gratuitous** – freely given.

¹² **attainted** – stained; corrupted; rendered incapable of inheriting.

¹³ **our vile original** – our sinful father Adam.

¹⁴ **lineage** – line of descent; relation to ancestors.

winning disposition. But, beloved, when God passed by the field in which we were lying (Eze 16:6), He saw no tears in our eyes until He put them there Himself. He saw no contrition¹⁵ in us until He had given us repentance. And there was no beauty in us that could induce Him to adopt us. On the contrary, we were everything that was repulsive. And if when He passed by, He had said, “Thou art cursed, be lost forever,” it would have been nothing but what we might have expected from a God Who had been so long provoked and Whose majesty had been so terribly insulted. But no—He found a rebellious child, a filthy, frightful, ugly child. He took it to His bosom and said, “Black though thou art, thou art comely in my eyes through my son Jesus. Unworthy though thou art, yet I cover thee with His robe; and in thy brother’s garments, I accept thee.” And taking us just as we were, all unholy and unclean, He took us to be His—His children, His forever!

Did you ever think what a high honor it is to be called a son of God? Suppose a judge of the land should have before him some traitor who was about to be condemned to die. Suppose that equity and law demanded that the wretch should shed his blood by some terrible punishment. But suppose it were possible for the judge to step from his throne and to say, “Rebel thou art, but I have found out a way whereby I can forgive thy rebellions. Man! Thou art pardoned!” There is a flush of joy upon his cheek. “Man! Thou art made rich! See, there is wealth!” Another smile passes over the countenance. “Man! Thou art made so strong that thou shalt be able to resist all thine enemies.” He rejoices again. “Man!” saith the judge at last, “Thou art made a prince! Thou art adopted into the royal family, and thou shalt one day wear a crown. Thou art now as much the son of God as thou art the son of thine own father.” You can conceive the poor creature fainting with joy at such a thought: that he whose neck was just ready for the [noose] should have his head now ready for a crown—that he who expected to be clothed in the felon’s garb and taken away to death is now to be exalted and clothed in robes of honor. So, Christian, think what thou didst deserve—robes of shame and infamy—but thou art to have those of glory!

From a sermon delivered at Exeter Hall, Strand.

Charles H. Spurgeon (1834-1892): Influential English Baptist preacher; born at Kelvedon, Essex, England, UK.



¹⁵ **contrition** – sincere sorrow for wrongdoing; repentance.

THE CAUSES OF ADOPTION

John Gill (1697-1771)

THE efficient cause [of adoption is] God. None can adopt any into the family of God but God Himself. None can put any among the children of God but He Himself. None but He can do it, Who says, “I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev 21:7). God—Father, Son, and Spirit—are concerned in the affair of adoption.

1. **God the Father:** “What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us”—the Father of Christ, the one God and Father of us all—“that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:2). The God and Father of Christ, Who blessed and chose His people in Him, predestinated them to the adoption of children by Him, both to the grace of adoption and to the inheritance they are adopted to and [that they] obtain in Christ in virtue thereof (Eph 1:11). He also predestinated them to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). He set up [Christ] as the pattern of their sonship, [so] that as He partook of their nature, they should be partakers of the divine nature; and that as He was a Son and Heir of all things, they should be likewise. [This] will more manifestly be seen when they shall appear to be what they are as sons and are like unto Him (Rom 8:29). Besides, God the Father has not only determined their adoption and all things relative to it, but He has provided this blessing in covenant for them and secured it there. This is one of the “all things” in which it is ordered and sure (2Sa 23:5); it is one of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, which He has blessed His people with in Christ. This covenant runs thus: “[I] will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2Co 6:18). Yes, the act of adoption itself, or putting among the children, is His act. For though He says, “How shall I put thee among the children?” (Jer 3:19), there being no difference between them and others by nature, they are as bad and as black as others; yet He did do it.

2. **The Son of God has a concern in adoption:** There are several connections and relations He stands in to His people, which serve greatly to illustrate and confirm it. There is a union between them, a very near and mysterious one (Joh 17:21); and from this union flow all the blessings of grace to the saints. They are first of God in Christ, and then He is everything to them. They have everything through Him to make them comfortable and happy; and, particularly, He and they being one, His God is their God, and His Father is their Father. He is a Son, and

they are sons. He is an heir, and they are joint-heirs with Him (Rom 8:17). There is a marriage-relation between Christ and His people: He has betrothed them to Himself in righteousness and that forever. He is their husband, and they are His spouse and bride. And as when a man marries a king's daughter, he is his son-in-law—as David was to Saul—so one that marries a king's son becomes his daughter. Thus, the church being married to Christ, the Son of God, becomes the King's daughter (Psa 45:13). Through the incarnation of Christ, He not only became the *Goel*, the near kinsman, but even a brother to those whose flesh and blood He partook of. Because He and they are of one and the same nature, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb 2:11). And if [they are] His brethren, then, as He is the Son of God, they must be sons of God too. Through the redemption wrought out by Him, they come to receive the adoption of children, the blessing before prepared for them in the purpose and covenant of God. Yes, Christ bestows the actual donation of the blessing of adoption: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (Joh 1:12). It is the Son Who makes free, that is, by making them children. For the children only are free, not servants (Joh 8:36).

3. The Spirit of God has also a concern in adoption: He is the author of regeneration, which, though it is not adoption, is the evidence of it. The sons of God are described as born of God (Joh 1:13); and this spiritual birth, which makes men appear to be the sons of God, is owing to the Spirit of God. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit," that is, of the grace of the Spirit compared to water, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God (Joh 3:5). It is by faith in Christ that men receive the adoption of children; hence, believers are said to be "the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). This receives and claims the privilege and blessing, which faith is of the operation of the Spirit of God...Moreover, it is the Spirit Who witnesses the truth of adoption. He bears witness to the spirits of believers that they are "the children of God" (Rom 8:15-16); they receive Him as the Spirit of adoption, Who is sent into their hearts for that purpose. For "because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6), all to which may be added that the several operations of the Spirit on the souls of men, such as His leadings and teachings, confirm unto them the truth of their sonship. "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14). [They] are led out of themselves and off of themselves to Christ and His righteousness. [They] are led into all truth as it is in Jesus and to the fulness of Christ; [they] are led

through Him, the Mediator, by the Spirit unto God as their Father. And [this] Spirit is given and abides as an earnest in their hearts, even the earnest of the inheritance they are adopted to, “until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14).

The moving cause of adoption is the love, grace, free favor, and good will of God. There was nothing in the creature that could move Him to it—no agreeable disposition in them, no amiableness in their persons, nor anything engaging in their conduct and behavior. But all [was] the reverse as before observed: wherefore, considering these things, the apostle breaks forth in this [moving] expression: “What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1), in which he points out the source and spirit of this blessing of grace—the amazing love of God!

The objects of adoption: They are such who are the objects of the love of God; for since adoption flows from the love of God, such who are the children of God must be interested in it. They are dear children, strongly interested in His affections, like Ephraim, dear sons and pleasant children whom God loves dearly and loves with a love of complacency and delight. They are the chosen of God; for such that are chosen of God in Christ are predestinated to the adoption of children by Him (Eph 1:5); hence sons before calling.¹ They are also redeemed from among men, out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation (Rev 5:9) being the children of God scattered abroad [that] Christ came to gather together (Joh 11:52); and who, through redemption by Him, receive the adoption of children, previously provided for them. Though, in their natural state, they are rebellious children, children that are corrupt and that are corrupters; children of wrath, by nature, as others, and in no wise better than others; but are only openly and manifestly the children of God when they [become] believers in Christ. Until then, they cannot be called the children of God by themselves or by others. Until then, they have no claim to the blessing nor have they the power, the privilege, the dignity, and honor to become the sons of God. These are the characters of the adopted ones, both secretly and openly.

From *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, Vol. 2,
(Tegg & Company, 1839), 93-102, in the public domain.

John Gill (1697-1771): Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar; born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England, UK.



¹ See Page 8, footnote 9.

THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD

John Murray (1898-1975)

ADOPTION is an act of God's grace distinct from and additional to the other acts of grace involved in the application of redemption. It might seem quite unnecessary to say this. Does not the term itself and the specific meaning that attaches to it clearly imply its distinctiveness? Yet it is not superfluous to emphasize the fact that it is a distinct act carrying with it its own peculiar privileges. It is particularly important to remember that it is not the same as justification or regeneration. Too frequently it has been regarded as simply an aspect of justification or as another way of stating the privilege conferred by regeneration. It is much more than either or both acts of grace.

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 sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty; they are introduced into and given the privileges of God's family. Neither justification nor regeneration precisely expresses that. A text that sets forth the special character of adoption is John 1:12: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power (authority) to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." We become children of God by the bestowment of a right or by the conferring of authority, and this is given to them who believe on Jesus' name.

There are a few things to be said, however, about the relation of adoption to these other acts of grace. 1. Though adoption is distinct, it is never separable from justification and regeneration. The person who is justified is always the recipient of sonship. And those who are given the right to become sons of God are those who, as John 1:13 indicates, "were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." 2. Adoption is, like justification, a judicial act. In other words, it is the bestowal of a status or standing, not the generating within us of a new nature or character. It concerns a relationship and not the attitude or disposition that enables us to recognize and cultivate that relationship. 3. Those adopted into God's family are also given the Spirit of adoption whereby they can recognize their sonship and exercise the privileges that go with it. "And because ye are sons,

God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6 *cf.* Rom 8:15-16). The Spirit of adoption is the consequence, but this does not itself constitute adoption. 4. There is a close relationship between adoption and regeneration. So close is this connection that some would say that we are sons of God both by participation of nature and by deed of adoption. There is Scriptural evidence that might support this inference. There are two ways whereby we may become members of a human family: we may be born into it, or we may be adopted into it. The former is by natural generation; the latter is by legal act. It may be that the Scripture represents us as entering the family of God by both—by generation and by adoption. However, this does not appear to be conclusive. In any case, there is a very close interdependence between the generative act of God’s grace (regeneration) and the adoptive. When God adopts men and women into His family, He insures that not only may they have the rights and privileges of His sons and daughters, but also the nature or disposition [consistent] with such a status. This He does by regeneration—He renews them after His image in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. God never has in His family those who are alien to its atmosphere and spirit and station. Regeneration is the prerequisite¹ of adoption. The same Holy Spirit Who regenerates is also sent into the hearts of the adopted, crying “Abba, Father.” But adoption itself is not simply regeneration, nor is it the Spirit of adoption—the one is prerequisite, the other is consequent.²

Adoption, as the term clearly implies, is an act of transfer from an alien family³ into the family of God Himself. This is surely the apex of grace and privilege. We would not dare to conceive of such grace, far less to claim it, apart from God’s own revelation and assurance. It staggers imagination because of its amazing condescension and love. The Spirit alone could be the seal of it in our hearts. “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1Co 2:9-10). It is only as there is the conjunction of the witness of revelation and the inward witness of the Spirit in our hearts that we can scale this pinnacle of faith and say with filial confidence and love, “Abba Father.”

Adoption is concerned with the fatherhood of God in relation to men. When we think of God’s fatherhood, it is necessary to make cer-

¹ **prerequisite** – condition that is required for something else to happen.

² **consequent** – following as a consequence.

³ **alien family** – family adverse or opposed to God; outside of God’s family.

tain distinctions. There is, first of all, God's fatherhood that is exclusively trinitarian: the fatherhood of the Father, the First Person of the Trinity, in relation to the Son, the Second Person. This applies only to God the Father in His eternal and necessary relation to the Son and to the Son alone. It is unique and exclusive. No one else, not even the Holy Spirit, is the Son in this sense. It does not apply to angels or men. In modern theology, it is sometimes said that men by adoption come to share in Christ's Sonship and thus enter the divine life of the Trinity. This is grave confusion and error. The eternal Son of God is the only-begotten, and no one shares in His Sonship, just as God the Father is not the Father of any other in the sense in which He is the Father of the only-begotten and eternal Son.

In relation to men, there is what has sometimes been called the universal fatherhood of God. It is true that there is a sense in which God may be said to be the Father of all men. Creatively and providentially, He gives to all men life and breath and all things. In Him all live and move and have their being. It is this relation that is referred to in such passages as Acts 17:25-29; Hebrews 12:9; James 1:18. Since we are the offspring of God, since He is the Father of spirits and the Father of lights (Jam 1:17), it may be Scriptural to speak of this relation that God sustains to all men in creation and providence as one of fatherhood and therefore of universal fatherhood. There are other passages in Scripture that might appear to speak even more explicitly of this relation in terms of fatherhood; but when examined carefully, some of them can clearly be shown not to refer to this fatherhood, and others more probably refer to a much more specific and restricted fatherhood. For example, in Malachi 2:10—"Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?"—it is not by any means certain that the allusion⁴ is to original creation and to God as Father of all men in virtue of creation.

What needs to be noted, in any case, is that on relatively few occasions in Scripture is the relation that God sustains to men in virtue of creation and general providence spoken of in terms of God's fatherhood. The term *Father* as applied to God and the title *son of God* as applied to men are all but uniformly in Scripture reserved for that particular relationship that is constituted by redemption and adoption. This teaches us the lesson that the great message of Scripture respecting the fatherhood of God, the message epitomized⁵ in such a text as, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but

⁴ **allusion** – indirect reference.

⁵ **epitomized** – condensed; summarized.

ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15); or in the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Mat 6:9), is not that of the universal fatherhood of God but the message of that most specific and intimate relationship that God constitutes with those who believe in Jesus’ name. To substitute the message of God’s universal fatherhood for that which is constituted by redemption and adoption is to annul⁶ the gospel. It means the degradation⁷ of this highest and richest of relationships to the level of the relationship that all men sustain to God by creation. In a word, it is to deprive the gospel of its redemptive meaning. And it encourages men in the delusion that our creaturehood is the guarantee of our adoption into God’s family.

The great truth of God’s fatherhood and of the sonship that God bestows upon men is one that belongs to the application of redemption. It is no truer in respect of all men than are effectual calling, regeneration, and justification. God becomes the Father of His own people by the act of adoption. It is the marvel of such grace that constrained the apostle John to exclaim, “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God” (1Jo 3:1)...To indicate the cleavage that this status institutes among men, he continues, “Therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” Lest there should be any doubt regarding the reality of the sonship bestowed, he insists, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (3:2). John had pondered and learned well the words of the Lord Himself when He said, “He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father...If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:21, 23). And now in writing his first epistle, his heart overflows with wonderment at this donation of the Father’s love: “Behold what manner of love *the Father* hath bestowed on us.” It is specifically the Father’s act of grace. John could not get over it, and he never will. Eternity will not exhaust its marvel.

From John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* © 1955,
Wm. B. Eerdmans Company, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted
by permission of the publisher; all rights reserved.

John Murray (1898-1975): Presbyterian theologian and author; born in Badbea, near Bonar Bridge, Sutherland County, Scotland, UK.



⁶ **annul** – do away with.

⁷ **degradation** – lowering in dignity.

GRACE REIGNS IN ADOPTION

Abraham Booth (1734-1806)

THE spiritual and divine adoption about which we treat is God's gracious admission of strangers and aliens into the state, relation, and enjoyment of all the privileges of children through Jesus Christ, according to that glorious promise of the new covenant: "[I] will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2Co 6:18). Reconciliation,¹ justification, and adoption may be thus distinguished. In reconciliation, God is considered as the injured party, and the sinner as an enemy to Him. In justification, our Maker sustains the character of supreme Judge, and man is considered as a criminal standing before His tribunal. In adoption, Jehovah appears as the fountain of honor, and the apostate sons of Adam as aliens from Him—as belonging to the family of Satan and as denominated children of wrath. In reconciliation, we are made friends; in justification, we are pronounced righteous; and in adoption, we are constituted heirs of the eternal inheritance

That believers are the children of God, the Scriptures expressly declare. They may be so called, as they are begotten and born from above; as they stand in a conjugal² relation to Christ; and as they are adopted into the heavenly family. These different ways in which the Scripture speaks of their filial³ relation to God are intended to aid our feeble conceptions when we think upon the grand, ineffable⁴ blessing: one mode of expression supplying, in some degree, the ideas that are lacking in another. To express the origin of spiritual life and the restoration of the divine image, we are said to be *born* of God. To set forth in the liveliest manner our most intimate union with the Son of the Highest, we are said to be *married* to Christ. And, that we might not forget our natural state of alienation from God and to intimate our title to the heavenly patrimony,⁵ we are said to be *adopted* by Him.

The condition, therefore, of all believers is most noble and excellent.

¹ **reconciliation** – change in relationship from being an enemy at war with God to peace with Him: in Christ, God reconciled sinners to Himself by Christ's substitutionary death and resurrection, thereby setting them free to restored union with God.

² **conjugal** – marital.

³ **filial** – having the relationship of a child to a parent.

⁴ **ineffable** – indescribable.

⁵ **patrimony** – inheritance from a father, in this case, from our heavenly Father.

Their heavenly birth, their divine Husband, and their everlasting inheritance loudly proclaim it. The beloved apostle, amazed at the love of God manifested in the privilege of adoption, could not forbear exclaiming with astonishment and rapture, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1). Here grace reigns. The vessels of mercy were predestinated to the enjoyment of this honor and happiness before the world began. The great Lord of all chose them for Himself, chose them for His children, that they might be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). This He did, not because of any worthiness in them, but of His own sovereign will. As it is written, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:5-6). “According to the good pleasure of his will”—this is the eternal source of the heavenly blessing. “By Jesus Christ”—this is the way of its communication to sinners. “To the praise of his glorious grace”—this is the [purpose] of bestowing it.

The persons adopted are sinners of Adam’s race, who, considered in their natural state, are estranged⁶ from God and guilty before Him, under sentence of death and obnoxious to⁷ ruin. Their translation, therefore, out of this deplorable condition into a state and relation so glorious is an instance of reigning grace. That the children of wrath should become the inheritors of glory and the slaves of Satan be acknowledged as the sons of Jehovah; that the enemies of God should be adopted into His family and have an indefeasible⁸ right to all the privileges of His children are astonishing to the last degree. Our character and state by nature are the most indigent,⁹ wretched, and abominable [and] render us fit for nothing after this life but to dwell with damned spirits and accursed fiends in the abodes of darkness and of despair. But, by the privilege of adoption, we are invested with such a character and are brought into such a state as render us fit to associate with saints in light, with angels in glory. What but omnipotent, reigning grace could be sufficient to effect so noble, so astonishing, so divine a change?

If we take a cursory¹⁰ view of those invaluable privileges, which in virtue of adoption the saints possess and of which they are heirs, our ideas of the superlative blessing will be still heightened. They have

⁶ **estranged** – alienated; separated.

⁷ **obnoxious to** – subject to; exposed to.

⁸ **indefeasible** – not able to be lost.

⁹ **indigent** – poor; needy.

¹⁰ **cursory** – hasty and without attention to detail.

the most honorable *character*; for they are called, not merely the servants or the friends, but the *sons* of God! This dignified character is unalterable; for the Lord Himself declares that it is “an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off” (Isa 56:5). If David so highly esteemed the character of son-in-law to an earthly king (1Sa 18:23), how much more should believers esteem that sublime¹¹ title—*the sons of God*—of Him, Who is King of kings and Lord of lords?

They are also called *kings* and *priests*, besides which august and venerable¹² titles, they are distinguished from the world by a rich variety of others that are obvious to every intelligent reader of the sacred writings. The dignity of their *relation* is immensely great. For, being the children of God, Jehovah Himself is their Father, and Christ acknowledges them for His brethren. Nor do they stand in relation to Jesus merely as brethren: they are also His bride. Nothing can be conceived more honorable or more beneficial than their conjugal¹³ relation to Him, for He is “the chiefest among ten thousand” and “altogether lovely” (Song 5:10,16). When David, though not yet in possession of the crown, sent his men to Abigail to take her to wife, that discreet widow “bowed herself...to the earth, and said, Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord” (1Sa 25:41). Now, may not the believer for infinitely greater reasons, with gratitude and astonishment, adore that beneficent¹⁴ hand that broke off his yoke of basest vassalage¹⁵ and joined him to David’s antitype,¹⁶ the heavenly Bridegroom—joined him in a marriage-covenant that shall never be broken in a union that shall never be dissolved?

Being the children of God, believers are the objects of His paternal affection and unremitting¹⁷ care. As a father, He guides them by His counsel and guards them by His power. Their disobedience He visits with a rod of correction; and in their distresses, He feels for them with ...paternal compassion. In the whole of His dealings with them, He manifests His love and causes all things to work together for their good (Rom 8:28). Yes, they are the darlings¹⁸ of providence and the charge of angels. Those ministering spirits, who are active as flame and swift as

¹¹ **sublime** – high; noble.

¹² **august and venerable** – majestic and honored.

¹³ **conjugal** – marital.

¹⁴ **beneficent** – actively kind; beneficial.

¹⁵ **basest vassalage** – lowliest slavery.

¹⁶ **antitype** – person or thing represented by a type or symbol; here, fulfilled by Christ.

¹⁷ **unremitting** – constant; unceasing.

¹⁸ **darlings** – dearest and best-loved ones.

thought, encamp around them; and, in ways unknown to mortals, [help forward] the designs of grace in promoting their best interests.

Nothing can exceed the riches and excellency of that *inheritance* to that they have a right in virtue of their adoption—that eternal inheritance which is bequeathed¹⁹ to them by an inviolable testament.²⁰ This testament, recorded in the sacred writings, was confirmed by the death of Christ. Their inheritance includes all the blessings of grace here and the full fruition of glory hereafter.

Though, as to temporal things, they be frequently indigent²¹ and much afflicted, yet the blessings of common providence are dispensed to them in such measures as paternal wisdom sees best for their spiritual welfare and the glory of God. For godliness hath the “promise of the life that now is,” as well as “of that which is to come” (1Ti 4:8); and their heavenly Father knoweth that they have need of His providential favors, while they continue in the present state (Mat 6:32). So that whether they be things temporal, spiritual, or eternal; whether they be things present or things to come, all are theirs. According to that admirable text, “All things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours” (1Co 3:21-22). But, which is yet more emphatic and the highest that words can express, the utmost our ideas can reach, the divine Spirit declares that they are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17). Each, therefore, has a right to say, “Jehovah Himself is my reward, my portion, and my inheritance.” Yea, such is the mutual property that God and His people have in each other that the inheritance is reciprocal²² between them. For “the portion of Jacob...is the former of all things; and Israel is the rod of his inheritance: the LORD of hosts is his name” (Jer 10:16). All the awful, the amiable, the adorable attributes of deity will appear glorious in the children of God; and they will enjoy them to their everlasting honor and unutterable bliss! What can the heart of man desire more? Or, what good thing will God withhold from them for whom He gave His Son (Rom 8:32), to whom He gives Himself?

In testimony to their sublime²³ relation and as an earnest²⁴ of their future inheritance, they receive “the Spirit of adoption,” by Whom

¹⁹ **bequeathed** – given or left by will, as an estate or legacy.

²⁰ **inviolable testament** – unbreakable covenant, i.e., the New Covenant.

²¹ **indigent** – poor.

²² **reciprocal** – shared.

²³ **sublime** – high; noble.

²⁴ **earnest** – something given as a promise of what is to come.

they cry with appropriation and confidence, “Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). The Spirit of adoption, as opposed to the spirit of bondage, is the Spirit of light and of liberty, of consolation and of joy. He glorifies Christ in the believer’s view and sheds divine love abroad in his heart. He brings the promises to his remembrance and enables him to plead them at the throne of grace. He elevates the affections to heavenly things and seals him as an heir of the kingdom to the day of redemption. Such are the privileges of God’s adopted sons in the vouchsafement²⁵ of which grace reigns.

What a mercy might we esteem it not to be confounded before the God of heaven! What a favor to obtain the least indulgent regard from the King eternal! What an honor to be admitted into His family, to occupy the place and to bear the character of His meanest²⁶ servant! But, to be His adopted children, Who is the Fountain of all bliss; and His espoused bride, Who is the Sovereign of all worlds; to have Him for our everlasting Father, Who is the [Creator] of all things; and Him for our Husband, Who is the object of angelic worship, are blessings divinely rich indeed! That sinful mortals, who may justly say to corruption, “Thou art our father,” and to the worm, “Thou art our sister” (Job 17:14), should be permitted to say to the infinite God, “Thou art our portion: All that Thou hast, and all that Thou art are ours, to render us completely happy and eternally blessed,” is an astonishing, delightful, transporting²⁷ thought! These are blessings: none greater than [these] can be conceived; none more glorious can be enjoyed.

Let the grandees²⁸ of the earth and the sons of the mighty boast of their high birth and large revenues, their pompous titles and splendid retinues, their delicate fare and costly array, still the poorest peasant that believes in Christ is incomparably superior to them all. What though they shine in silk and embroidery or glitter in gold and jewels; though their names be adorned with the highest epithets²⁹ that men can bestow, while a profusion of worldly riches is poured into their lap; yet they must soon “lie down...in the dust” (Job 21:26), on a level with the meanest of mortals. “The worms shall [quickly] cover them” (Job 21:26), and their memory shall rot. But your name—O weakest of Christians!—your new name is everlasting. However neglected or despised among men, it shall stand forever fair in the Book of Life.

²⁵ **vouchsafement** – act of granting favor.

²⁶ **meanest** – lowliest.

²⁷ **transporting** – ecstatic; ravishing.

²⁸ **grandees** – noblemen of the highest rank.

²⁹ **epithets** – descriptive words or phrases.

Though you are not distinguished as a person of eminence while you proceed on your pilgrimage and receive not the acclamations of the people but walk in the [sorrows and troubles] of life, yet you are high in the estimation of heaven. [You are not] destitute of the sublimest³⁰ honors. Your praise is not of men but of God. He knows the way that you take and commands the angels to consider you as the object of their regard. Though you cannot boast of illustrious ancestors or of noble blood, yet, being born from above, the blood royal of heaven runs in your veins. Though not a favorite of your temporal sovereign, yet, like a prince, you have power with the God of Israel. Though ever so poor as to this world, the unsearchable riches of Christ are all your own. Though you have not a numerous train of attendants, and though your mansion be a cobwebbed cottage, yet the holy angels are your guard and minister to your good. The God of glory not only condescends to come under your lowly roof, but even to dwell with you. Yours is the honorable character; yours is the happy state. This is felicity,³¹ which all the wealth of the Indies cannot procure. This is honor, which all the crowned heads in the world cannot confer. The Lord of hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all other glory, but this honor shall never be laid in the dust. What a shade it casts on every secular distinction when forced to feel how very fleeting it is! How encouraging to reflect on the durable and exalted happiness of the sons of God! Christianity! It is thine to ennoble the human mind and to make it really great. Grace! It is thine to raise the poor from the dunghill and the needy out of the dust. Thine it is to number them among the princes of heaven and to seat them on thrones of glory.

From *The Works of Abraham Booth*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Haddon, 1813), 196-207; in the public domain.

Abraham Booth (1734-1806): English Baptist preacher.



By [adoption,] God transfers us strangers and foreigners (who were the servants or slaves of Satan) from the family of the old Adam and the power of darkness and admits us into His own family and the kingdom of light and gives us the dignity of sons. He not only bestows upon us the glorious name of dearly beloved sons with the distinctions and honors pertaining to them, but also gives us a right to all His goods of grace as well as of glory. All this comes under the name of inheritance as acquired not by any merit but given by the mere grace of the Father.—*Francis Turretin*

³⁰ **sublimest** – highest; noblest.

³¹ **felicit**y – intense happiness; state of wellbeing.

NATURE AND BENEFITS OF ADOPTION

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981)

LET us approach this doctrine by first of all considering the Scriptures in which the term is mentioned. Turn first to Romans 9:4, where we read these words: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” The apostle is there referring to his kinsmen according to the flesh—the Jews, the Israelites—and I will show you later why I put that particular quotation before the next that comes from Romans 8:15: “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear,” says the apostle, “but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” In verse 23 of that same chapter, Paul uses the term again when he is talking about this day that is to come. He says that “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” Then the next time we find the term is in Galatians 4:4-5. Paul is talking about how “when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law”—for this reason—“to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” And there is another reference to it in Ephesians 1:5: “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

There, then, are our Scriptures, and it is our business now to discover what exactly they mean and what this term *adoption* represents. So, as we come to a definition, we had best perhaps, first of all, look at it from the standpoint of the *etymology*—the root meaning of the word—and it is this: the placing of a son. But in ancient languages, it also came to mean something that it still means with us, namely, the transfer from one family to another and the placing of the one who has been so transferred as a son or daughter in the new, the second family.

Now, if that is the primary, fundamental meaning of the term, that, at once, brings us to a consideration of the meaning of the term *son* and especially the meaning of the term as used in Scripture. As you go through the Bible, you will find that *son* is used in the following ways: in the singular, it invariably refers to the Lord Jesus Christ and to Him

alone. He is *the* Son. Sometimes He is even referred to without the indefinite article as *Son*. He stands alone, in that sense, as *the* Son of God.

The term is also used in the plural of angels, and one gathers from the way in which it is so used and from the context that this is because the angels are God's favored creatures, and because, in the matter of intelligence and in certain other respects, they are like God Himself. The term is applied to angels in that way in Job chapters 1 and 6.

Then, in the third place, there is a very interesting use of this term *sons* in Psalm 82:6, where it is applied to human magistrates: "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High." That is a very important statement because you will recall that in John 10:34, our Lord Himself quoted it when certain people objected to the fact that He was claiming to be the Son of God. Clearly it means that magistrates are sons of God in the sense that authority has been delegated to them from God and that, therefore, in the exercise of their magisterial functions, they are doing something that God Himself does.

The fourth use of this term refers to men and women as subjects of divine adoption; and here we must divide it up into *general* and *special* adoption. In the statement in Romans 9:4, Paul is referring to the nation of Israel. He says in verses 2-4, "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart," for "I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption..." In a sense, that is a reference to Exodus 4:22 where God addresses the nation of Israel and tells them that He is adopting them as His son. Adoption is a term, therefore, that can be used in general of the nation of Israel. They were God's particular people. That is why, in speaking through Amos, God said to them, "You only have I known of all the families [*nations*] of the earth." Of course, He knew about all the other nations, but He had a special interest in Israel. As a nation, they were the son of God. But the special use of this term is spiritual, and that is our primary concern: God adopting certain people to become His sons in a spiritual manner...

There is a sharp distinction between the children of God and the children of this world. "The whole world," says John in the first epistle, "lieth in wickedness," but, "we are of God" (1Jo 5:19). It is a distinction that is found everywhere, so we must reject this notion of the universal fatherhood of God and the universal brotherhood of man.

The second point is the whole question of the relationship of our sonship to our Lord's Sonship. This, again, is very important. In becoming

the children of God, we do not become identical with the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the God-man, very God of very God and perfect man—perfect God, perfect man. We are not made gods. When we become children of God, we do not become God in the sense that our Lord was. Our Lord Himself was very careful to emphasize that distinction. Take, for instance, what He said in giving His disciples the model prayer. He said, “After this manner therefore pray ye” (Mat 6:9). He did not include Himself. That is how you and I are to pray, and we say, “Our Father.” He is not included with us, He did not pray that particular prayer.

But after His resurrection, our Lord made a still more specific statement. He said to one of the women, “Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father and to my God, and your God” (Joh 20:17). Why did He divide it up in that way? The reason is, obviously, that He was anxious to preserve this distinction. He did not say, “I ascend unto our God and unto our Father.” No, He is the only begotten, He is the Son of God by generation; we are sons of God by adoption. And that is a most essential distinction.

This enables us to go a step further in our exact definition of what is meant by the adoption. We can describe it, therefore, as that judicial act of God by which He confers or bestows upon us the status or the standing of children. That is its real meaning. And I am anxious to stress the fact that it is a distinct and a special movement, or division, of the work of the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption. It must be differentiated from all the other acts, and yet we must not separate it. It is a distinct step, but it is not an entirely separate step, as I have been emphasizing. There is a sense in which these things, as it were, happen all together—regeneration and faith and justification, and so on. The same applies to this great act of adoption; and yet, for the sake of clear thinking, we must differentiate in our minds between these things. Adoption is not the same as justification; it is not even a part of justification but is quite separate. In justification... God declares us to be righteous; it is a declaratory, a forensic [*judicial*] act. He declares that our sins are forgiven and that He accepts the righteousness of Christ that He has put upon us. So, justification is not adoption. In the same way, we must be clear that adoption and regeneration are not synonymous. In regeneration, we are given the new nature; we become partakers of the divine nature. We become new creations, new creatures. But that is not adoption.

In a sense, adoption is a combination of justification and regeneration. It is the new creature in a new relationship to God—as a child of God. Adoption is more than justification; it is more than regeneration, but it

includes them both. Here is the man or woman with the new nature, declared to be just and free from the Law and its condemnation and to be positively righteous. Yes, but, in addition to all that, now declared to be a child of God. In a sense, again, it is a judicial act and another proclamation. But it proclaims something new, something different. By adoption, then, we become the children of God and are introduced into and given the privileges that belong to members of God's family...

So, let me come to something more important and more interesting. What are the proofs that any one of us can have that we have been adopted? Well, you can find the Scriptural proof: "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:26). Also, in 1 Peter 1:3-6, you find it again: we have been begotten again "unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you"—for us who believe in Him. We are the inheritance, that is, the children. It is for all of us who believe in Christ.

Then the second way of assurance is that we are given "the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15); "We receive the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:5). You can be assured of the fact that you have received the adoption because you know that the Holy Spirit is dwelling within you. We saw the evidence for that earlier, so you can work it out. Especially, we have His testimony with our spirits that we are the children of God. If we have that testimony of the Spirit with our spirit, it is an absolute proof that we have received the adoption.

And then last of all, I would put the fact that we are led by the Spirit. That is Paul's argument: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom 8:14). Paul does not say, "As many as are actively acting as peacemakers or who are loving their enemies..." No! "As many as are led by the Spirit of God"—those who subject themselves to His leading and who rejoice in being led by Him, they are the sons of God.

There, then, are the proofs. Now, finally, let us consider the *results of our adoption*. First, if we have the Spirit of adoption, we have lost "the spirit of bondage again to fear" (Rom 8:15). Positively, in the second place, we have been given a spirit of liberty. In other words, we are no longer afraid of the Law and its condemnation; we are no longer afraid of death; we are enjoying something of the glorious liberty of the children of God. Again, thirdly, I would remind you that we receive this spirit of adoption through the indwelling Spirit.

But then, in addition, there are these results: because we have been

adopted into God's family, we are entitled to bear His name...He has said, "I will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev 26:12)...

What else? Well, the fifth benefit is that we enjoy the present protection and consolation that God alone can give, and the provision that He makes for His children. "Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered" (Luk 12:7); nothing can happen to us apart from Him. Think of those gracious and glorious promises that are given to the children and that we prove to be true in experience: protection, consolations, and the perfect provision for our every need. He has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb 13:5)—come what may.

The next benefit, at first, is not so pleasurable—fatherly chastisements. That is the whole argument of the first half of Hebrews 12: "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (12:6). The argument is that if we are not receiving chastisement, then, we are not sons, but bastards. If we are children of God, He will chastise us for our good: "Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (12:11). So that this is a very definite result of our adoption. If we are children of God, He is determined to bring us to glory and if we will not listen to His leading and teaching, He will chastise us because He loves us and because we are His sons. Because He has set His love and affection upon us, He is going to bring us through...

The last point is the certainty and the security of it all. Yes, says Peter, you have been called to this "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1Pe 1:4), and therefore secure. Paul has said the same thing in Romans 8:38-39: "I am persuaded, that neither death nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." If God has adopted you into His family, if you are a child of God, your destiny is secure, it is certain...It is a guarantee. If God has taken me into the family, I am not only a child, I am an heir, and nothing and no one can ever rob me of the inheritance.

From *Great Doctrines of the Bible* by Martyn Lloyd-Jones, © 2003 by Bethan Lloyd-Jones, 179-189. USA distribution by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187. Worldwide distribution by permission of Hodder & Stoughton, London, England.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981): Welsh expository preacher and author.



FROM SATAN'S FAMILY TO GOD'S

John Dick (1764-1833)

ADOPTION, according to the Scriptural sense of the term, is an act of God by which He pronounces sinful men to be His sons, admits them into His family, and gives them a right to the privileges of His children. With a view to illustrate this general definition, I request your attention to the following particulars:

First, as an adopted son originally belonged to a different family from that into which he was admitted, we must inquire from what family the children of God are taken. We might say, then, that they are of the family of Adam, understanding by this expression, not merely that they are his natural offspring—his sons and daughters by lineal¹ descent—but that they were born in his image and after his likeness and derive from him the guilt, the pollution, and the curse, which he has bequeathed to them as a fatal inheritance. We might accommodate to our present purpose the words of God to His ancient people: “Look unto the rock whence ye were hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye were digged” (Isa 51:1). Look unto Adam your father and unto Eve that conceived you in sin and brought you forth in iniquity.

The Scriptures give another view of the subject and pronounce all men in their fallen state to be the children not only of Adam, but of him by whose artifice² they were reduced to their present condition. “Ye are of your father the devil,” said our Lord to the Jews (Joh 8:44). Ye boast of your connection with Abraham and found upon it the hope of acceptance with God; but your conduct proves you to be the genuine offspring of the enemy of all righteousness; for He adds, “and the lusts of your father ye will do” (Joh 8:44). Lest, however, we should suppose that this character is applicable to them alone on account of their peculiar depravity manifested in the rejection of the Messiah, the Scripture is careful to comprehend all unregenerated men under the same denomination: “He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning...In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1Jo 3:8, 10). To the justness of this description in reference to notorious transgressors, few will

¹ **lineal** – direct line of ancestry.

² **artifice** – trickery.

be disposed to object. In their blasphemy, their profaneness, their malice, their envy, their violence and cruelty, we distinctly perceive the horrid features of the spirit of darkness. But pride, self-confidence, a dislike of the divine character and laws, repugnance³ to the will of our Maker, and a constant inclination to sin, which are found in every man who has not been born again, are indications not less certain that we are guided by the counsels and actuated⁴ by the temper of the first rebel against the righteous government of God. "He is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience" (Eph 2:2). All the children of disobedience, therefore, are his sons. Although they may disown their relation, they daily recognize it by their unholy thoughts and actions; and unless divine mercy interposes,⁵ [they] will receive the inheritance of wrath, which is their allotted⁶ portion.

Secondly, as an adopted son became a member of a new family, so he upon whom this spiritual privilege is conferred is enrolled among the children of God. Like the prodigal who had gone into a far country and, having there wasted his substance in riotous living, was reduced to extreme distress, he returns, or rather by divine grace is brought back, to the house of his heavenly Father; and his father, to adopt the language of the parable, falling on his neck and embracing him in the arms of his love, does not place him in the condition of a servant, but restores him to the name and the right of a son. And how glorious is this family to which we are reunited! First in dignity and honor is Jesus Christ Himself, Who in His divine person is the eternal Son of God, and in His mediatorial⁷ character stands in a particular relation to believers. The Scripture calls Him "the first-born among many brethren" (Rom 8:29), intimating that He belongs to the heavenly family in which He claims precedence⁸ and holds the most distinguished place. He is the Elder Brother; for He and the other children, or those of them who are taken from among men, are par-

³ **repugnance** – contradictory opposition.

⁴ **actuated** – moved to action.

⁵ **interposes** – comes between; intervenes.

⁶ **allotted** – given in portions.

⁷ **mediatorial** – referring to a go-between; "It pleased God in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus His only begotten Son, according to the Covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and Man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; Head and Savior of His Church, the heir of all things, and judge of the world: Unto whom He did from all Eternity give a people to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified." (*Second London Baptist Confession*, 8.1) See also Free Grace Broadcaster 183, *Christ the Mediator*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

⁸ **precedence** – condition of being considered more important than someone else.

takers of a common nature. And for this cause, “he is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb 2:11-12).

Next in order are those glorious beings who, having retained their purity and fidelity, have continued without interruption to enjoy the honor and felicity⁹ of their primeval¹⁰ state. Angels are the sons of God, as we formerly remarked, and constitute an illustrious portion of the family, distinguished by the excellence of their nature, the superiority of their endowments, the ardor¹¹ of their love, and their unwearied activity. To them we are united by adoption; for the inhabitants of heaven and the saints upon earth compose one holy society under the protection and government of Him in Whom all things are gathered together. Lastly, there are the saints triumphant and militant, who, although separated from one another in place, a part being in a state of manhood while the other part can be considered as only in infancy, are all invested with the same high character and stand in the same relation to God. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the prophets and apostles, the martyrs and confessors, and believers of every age and nation are associated in one great brotherhood. Taken by sovereign grace from the degraded and ruined family to which we naturally belonged, we are introduced into the fellowship of the most glorious creatures in the universe: the bright spirits who minister before the throne of the Eternal in heaven and the happy men upon whom His own hand has impressed the image of His perfection. “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24). How wonderful the change that takes place in adoption, whether we consider it in itself or in its consequences! “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1Jo 3:1).

[Spiritual adoption,] like civil adoption, consists in translating a person from the family in which he was born into that of a stranger. In the case of civil adoption, the translation was made at the desire and by the authority of the person who, having no children of his own, had

⁹ **felicity** – intense happiness.

¹⁰ **primeval** – earliest or original state.

¹¹ **ardor** – fiery intensity.

recourse to this expedient¹² to supply the want. In like manner, the admission of sinners into the family of heaven is the act of God, by Whom we are blessed with all spiritual blessings. It is an act of His grace and authority: of His grace, in choosing persons so unworthy to enjoy this high honor; of His authority, in dissolving their original connection and constituting a new relation between them and Himself. Birth, external privileges, corporeal¹³ and mental accomplishments, and the suffrages¹⁴ of others cannot elevate us to this dignity. "We are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (Joh 1:13). The same sentence that acquits us from guilt and restores us to favor, invests us with the privilege of sonship and all the blessings attached to it. "It shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos 1:10).

The meritorious cause of adoption is the mediation of Christ, as we learn from the words formerly quoted: "God sent forth his Son to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal 4:5). By taking our nature, Jesus has raised it from its fallen state in which it was divested¹⁵ of its glory and so depraved that its Maker could not hold communion with it. Its dignity is restored in the person of our Savior; and, through Him, it is now worthy to stand in the presence of God and to be distinguished by the tokens of His love. But this is not all.

He has redeemed us from the curse of the Law and procured that the forfeiture of our sonship should be reversed. He has made satisfaction for our sins, and not only appeased the anger of God, but, by His infinitely valuable obedience, obtained for us all the blessings of salvation. "But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who some time were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ...Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph 2:13, 19). His righteousness, imputed to believers, gives them a title to the precious fruits of His death; and the union with Him,¹⁶ which is formed by the Spirit, places them in the same relation to God with Himself. "Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (Joh 20:17).

¹² **expedient** – means to an end.

¹³ **corporeal** – bodily.

¹⁴ **suffrages** – favorable opinions.

¹⁵ **divested** – deprived.

¹⁶ See FGB 214, *Union with Christ*, available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

The last remark that I shall make relates to how we obtain the actual possession of the privilege of adoption...In civil adoption, the consent of the person to be adopted was demanded and publicly expressed. Something similar takes place in spiritual adoption. The privilege is [preached] to us in the gospel; but it does not become ours until we accept of it. Although we do not and cannot merit it, yet our consent is required and is indispensably necessary. Now, this consent consists in faith, which implies our cordial¹⁷ acceptance of the blessings that Christ purchased for us and of which God makes a free gift to us in the gospel. Hence, to believe in Christ and to receive Him are used in the Scriptures as equivalent terms. “Art thou willing,” God says, “that I shall be thy Father?” The believing sinner answers, “I am willing.” “As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (Joh 1:12). Now, they are no longer aliens and outcasts, but the members of His family, the objects of His affection and care and heirs of the glory that shall be revealed. “They are called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord hath named” (Isa 62:2).

From *Lectures on Theology*, 2nd ed., Vol. 3, 1838 (Reprint, Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2004), 406-412, www.tentmaker.org.uk.

John Dick (1764-1833): Scottish minister and theologian; born in Aberdeen, Scotland, UK.



Let it be duly noted that it is through Jesus Christ [that] we are sons and heirs of God. Christ is our pattern in election—the One to Whose image we are predestinated to be conformed. Christ is God’s natural Son, and we become (by union with Christ) God’s legal sons. “That he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29) signifies that God did set up Christ as the prototype and masterpiece and made us to be so many little copies and models of Him. Every dignity we possess, every blessing we enjoy—save our election when God chose us in Him—we owe to Christ. He is the virtual cause of our adoption.—*Arthur W. Pink*

God sent His Son, and now He sends His Spirit. Because Christ has been sent, therefore the Spirit is sent; and now you shall know the Holy Ghost’s indwelling because of Christ’s incarnation. The Spirit of light, the Spirit of life, the Spirit of love, the Spirit of liberty—the same Spirit that was in Christ Jesus is in you. The same Spirit that descended upon Jesus in the waters of baptism also descended upon you. You, O child of God, have the Spirit of God as your present guide and comforter; and He shall be with you forever. The life of Christ is your life, and the Spirit of Christ is your Spirit.—*C. H. Spurgeon*

¹⁷ **cordial** – heartfelt.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878)

IT would only be presenting a limited view of the Spirit's work as a witness if we confined His work in this character to the testimony He bears for Christ. He is not only a witness *for* Christ, but He witnesses *to* the saints of God. This is clear from His own sacred Word: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself" (1Jo 5:10). "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1Jo 4:13). "Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2Co 1:22). But the most direct allusion to this truth is this: "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1Jo 4:13). Let us present a brief outline of this subject...

The doctrine of an *assured* belief of the pardon of sin, of acceptance in Christ, and of adoption into the family of God has been and still is regarded by many as an attainment never to be expected in the present life. And when it is expressed, it is viewed with a suspicion unfavorable to the character of the work. But this is contrary to the divine Word and to the actual experience of millions who have lived and died in the full assurance of hope. The doctrine of assurance is a doctrine of undoubted revelation—implied and expressed. That it is enforced as a state of mind *essential to the salvation of the believer*, we cannot admit. But that it is insisted upon as essential to his comfortable and holy walk and as greatly involving the glory of God, we must strenuously maintain. Otherwise, why do we have these marked references to the doctrine? In Colossians 2:1-2, Paul expresses "great conflict" for the saints that their "hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding." In the epistle to the Hebrews, the writer says, "We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end" (6:11). And in chapter 10:22, he exhorts them, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." And to crown all, the apostle Peter thus earnestly exhorts his readers, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2Pe 1:10). No further proof from the sacred Word is required to authenticate the doctrine. It is written as with a sunbeam that "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom 8:16). Let us present a brief explanation of these words....

First, “the Spirit itself beareth witness.” The great business of making known to a poor sinner his acquittal in the high court of heaven and his adoption into the King’s family is entrusted to no inferior agent. No angel is commissioned to bear the tidings, no mortal man may disclose the secret. None but God the Holy Ghost Himself! *The Spirit itself!* He that rests short of this testimony wrongs his own soul. See that you rely on no witness to your “calling and election” but this. Human testimony is feeble here. Your minister, your friend, schooled as they may be in the evidences of experimental godliness, cannot assure your spirit that you are “born of God.” God the eternal Spirit alone can do this. He alone is competent. He alone can fathom the “deep things of God” (1Co 2:10). He alone can rightly discern between His own work and its counterfeit, between grace and nature. He alone can make known the secret of the Lord to them that fear Him. All other testimony to your sonship is uncertain and may fearfully and fatally deceive. “It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth” (1Jo 5:6). Again, and yet again, would we solemnly repeat it: take nothing for granted touching your personal interest in Christ. Do not rest satisfied with the testimony of your own spirit or with that of the holiest saint on earth. Seek nothing short of the Spirit itself. This alone will do for a dying hour.

The second thing to be observed in the declaration is that *with which He witnesses*: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit.” It is a personal testimony, not borne to others, but to *us*, “with our spirit.” The adoption of the believer into the family of God is so great a privilege, involving blessings so immense, for beings so sinful and in all respects unworthy, that, if their heavenly Father did not assure them by His own immediate testimony of its truth, no other witness would suffice to remove their doubts, quiet their fears, and satisfy them as to their real sonship. The eternal Spirit of God descends and enters their hearts as a witness to their adoption. He first renews our spirit, applies the atoning blood to the conscience, works faith in the heart, enlightens the understanding, and thus prepares the believing soul for the revelation and assurance of this great and glorious truth—his adoption into the family of God. As it is “with our spirit” the Holy Ghost witnesses, it is necessary that, to perfect agreement and harmony, he who has the witness within himself should first be a repenting and believing sinner. He who says that he has this witness, but who still remains “dead in sins”—a stranger to faith in the Lord Jesus, to the renewings of the Holy Ghost, in a word, who is not *born of God*—is wrapping himself up in an awful deception. The witness

we plead for is the *holy* testimony, in concurrence with a *holy* gospel, by a *holy* Spirit, to a *holy* man, and concerning a *holy* truth. There can be no discrepancy, no lack of harmony between the witness of the Spirit and the Word of God. He witnesses according to and in agreement with the truth. Vague and fanciful impressions, visions and voices, received and rested upon as evidences of salvation are fearful delusions. Nothing is to be viewed as an evidence of our divine sonship that does not square and harmonize with the revealed Word of God. We must have a “thus saith the Lord” for every step we take in believing that we are the children of God. Let it be remembered, then, that the Spirit bears His testimony to *believers*. His first step is to work repentance and faith in the heart; then follows the sealing and witnessing operation: “In whom also *after that ye believed*, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13).

The last aspect is the great truth to which He testifies, namely “*that we are the children of God.*” The Spirit is emphatically spoken of as a Spirit of adoption. “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15). And again, “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). Now, it is the peculiar office of the Spirit to witness to the adoption of the believer. Look at the blessed fact to which He testifies—not that we are the *enemies*, the *aliens*, the *strangers*, the *slaves*, but that we are “the children of God.” High and holy privilege! *The children of God!* Chosen from all eternity: “having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5)—all their iniquities laid on Jesus their blessed Surety; justified by the “Lord our righteousness”; called by the effectual operation of the eternal Spirit; inhabited, sanctified, and sealed by God the Holy Ghost. O exalted state! O holy privilege! O happy people! Pressing on, it may be, through strong corruptions, deep trials, clinging infirmities, fiery temptations, sore discouragements, dark providences, and often the hidings of a Father’s countenance—and yet “the children of God” *now* and soon to be glorified hereafter.

Reader, in closing, let me ask you: *have you the witness of the Spirit?* Has He convinced you of sin by the Law? Has He made you acquainted with your guilt and pollution? Is it written upon your conscience as solemnly and as undoubtedly as it is written in the Bible that you are guilty and condemned, lost and undone, and must finally and awfully perish without Christ? Have you sought a secret place for humiliation

and confession and supplication before God, the eternal and holy God, the Sovereign of all worlds, the Judge of the quick and dead at whose tribunal you soon must stand? Ah, solemn, searching questions! You may evade them, you may frame some vain excuse, you may wait for “a more convenient season” (Act 24:25), you may even seek to stifle the seriousness and the thoughtfulness that these questions have occasioned, by another and a deeper plunge into the world; but they will follow you *there* and will be heard amid the din of business and the loud laugh of pleasure. They will follow you to your dying bed, and they will be heard *there* amid the gloom and the silence and the terror of that hour. They will follow you up to the judgment seat and will be heard *there* amid the gatherings and the tremendous disclosures of that scene. They will follow you down to the abode of the lost and will be heard *there*, amid the “weeping, and the wailing, and the gnashing of teeth” (Mat 22:13). Sinner! From an enlightened, but guilty and accusing conscience, you can never escape. It will be the worm that never dies (Mar 9:44)! From the wrath of God, you can then find no shelter. It will be “the fire that never shall be quenched” (Mar 9:43)! Again, we earnestly inquire—have you the witness of the Spirit? Has He testified to you of Jesus, of His renewing grace, pardoning love, sin-cleansing blood, justifying righteousness, and full redemption? Have you joy and peace in believing?

To the child of God, we would say, “*Covet earnestly the witness of the Spirit.*” Do not be cast down, nor cherish rash and hasty conclusions as to your adoption, if you do not possess it so fully and clearly as others. The holiest believer may walk for many days without the sun. Read the record of the experiences of David, of Job, of Jeremiah, and of the *last moments* of our dear and adorable Immanuel, and mark what shadows at times fell upon their souls, how a sense of comfort failed them, how joys fled, and they *mourned an absent God*. But were they the less dear to the heart of Jehovah? Were they the less His beloved children because they were thus tried? No! God forbid! Still, we plead for the full enjoyment of the witness of the Spirit. It is the high privilege of the children of God—let no one rob them of it to look up to God, and humbly yet unceasingly cry, “Abba, Father!”

From *The Inquirer Directed to the Work of the Holy Spirit* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1856), 190-220, in the public domain.

Octavius Winslow (1808-1878): Baptist pastor and author; later an Anglican priest; born in Pentonville, England, UK.



WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM

John Eadie (1810-1876)

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.—1 John 3:2

OUR sonship, we rejoice to be thus informed, is not a blessing awaiting us in some distant sphere of being. It is a present privilege: “Now are we the sons of God.” Despite this non-recognition on the part of the world, *we are the sons of God*. The reality of our adoption is not modified by the world’s [unawareness] of it. It may be undiscovered by others, but our own experience gives us the full assurance of it. As soon as faith springs up in the heart, we are reinstated in the family of God, cherished, protected, and sanctified—enjoying the children’s privileges, eating the children’s bread, possessing the children’s [exclusive rights], and being made [fit] for the children’s home.¹

But noble as is our present condition, our ultimate dignity surpasses conception: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be.” It has not been revealed. It is matter of faith, and it is still wrapped in mystery. It may be questioned if human language has nerve and sinew enough to bear upon it a description of the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2Co 4:17). It might be doubted, too, if we were qualified to comprehend it though it had been revealed—if the words of such an oracle would not have been to us like the algebraic symbols of an unknown quantity. For our own present experience, blissful though it be, scarce lays a foundation for [an indication] as to our future state...When Pharaoh’s daughter opened the basket of bulrushes on the bank of the Nile, it did not then appear what that weeping babe should be—the hero, legislator, and saint. We are not therefore to expect too much in the meantime. The apostle Paul, as he speaks of the children and affirms that they are heirs, adds in the same spirit, “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17). Suffering and depression are not incompatible with sonship, for the children are spiritually related to Him Who was the “Man of sorrows” (Isa 53:3). There is so much about us that clogs and confines us, so much that is sinful and oppressive, so

¹ children’s home – eternity with Christ.

deep is the shadow that earth throws over the children of God that any inference as to coming freedom and glory is all but an impossibility. Such being the present eclipse of our sonship, there is the less wonder that “the world knoweth us not” (1Jo 3:1). The Son of Mary—a carpenter, a man of sorrows, poor, and persecuted—was not Himself in such a disguise seen to be the Son of God.

Yet there is a leading thought that the apostle presents as a guide; and by following it, we may obtain some glimpse of future blessedness. It is as a central picture that stands out with peculiar prominence; and though we be not able to fill up its entire outline or throw over it the living luster of eternity, yet may we argue and imagine from the portion unveiled as to the nobleness and splendor of what is concealed: “We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” In this declaration, Christ is not formally mentioned. It needed not. The apostle’s readers could not mistake the reference. Only one being could possess that peculiar excellence and position. “When [Christ] shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” This truth is an unshaken first principle on which all our conclusions are to be based.

Christ shall appear. This is the blessed hope of the church: “The glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Ti 2:13). He left the world with the promise of revisiting it. He has peculiar interest in it: the scenes of His nativity and suffering must have a special charm for Him. When He ascended and the eleven were straining their aching eyeballs to obtain a glimpse of His lessening form so fast disappearing among the clouds, the angels said to them, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Act 1:11). He shall appear in majesty: In his own glory, the glory of his Father, and in that of his holy angels (Luk 9:26). That bright humanity shall outshine the sun and supply its place to a startled world. For “He shall appear”—in the glory of His original Godhead, blended with the majesty of crowned Redeemer; arrayed in the regal apparel of Universal Governor; surrounded by a dense and innumerable retinue, and about to exercise His last and loftiest prerogative of judgment—then—then—“we shall see him as he is”!

The inference is that we have never yet seen Him as He is, never beheld His unshaded splendor. We have been privileged only to gaze upon His portraiture, sketched indeed by the pencil of inspiration. Yet a likeness, no matter how exactly [portrayed] and naturally colored it may be, can never be compared with the living original. But

we shall see Him face to face without any intervention. Yes—that same Jesus Who lived and died, Who wept and conquered; the Man-God in His actual person—“as he is”—the brightest and loveliest Being of the universe. Yes, “as he is”! No semblance of Him, no cloudy phantom; but the Lord of glory before us, near us, as really as when He walked, spoke, and lived among the houses and hamlets of Judea. For it is no dim glimpse we are to obtain, no sudden [flash or sparkle] to dazzle us, no partial view that shall only create a longing for a fuller inspection; but leisurely and at large “we shall see him as he is.” Who can tell the bliss or glory of such a vision? There is no being like Christ. In His mysterious constitution, He combines deity and humanity, and the highest glories of the universe sit in gracefulness upon Him. That crucified Man is now Lord of all and “as he is,” without veil shall we behold Him. He was seen of old in symbol, and at length was He beheld in flesh; but the symbol was dim in its transparency, and the flesh hid in its mantle the splendors of His Godhead. But He shall now be revealed in the radiance of deity, mingling with the brightness of a glorified humanity and heightened by the imperial luster of the “great white throne” (Rev 20:11).

On seeing Him, “we shall be like him.” The meaning is not that we shall be like Him and therefore shall be qualified to see Him; but that when we see Him, completed likeness to Him shall be the result of the wonderful vision! If a partial and interrupted view of Him begets partial [likeness] on earth, the vision of Him “as he is” will surely bring us into full and final conformity. In the same way as, by a discovery of modern science, the rays of the sun falling on your countenance transfer its features in an instant to a surface of metal or glass, so this vision of Jesus will at once communicate to His people His blessed and [imperishable] image. Only when He comes again do they wear their entire nature to be capable of being universally like Him; for their bodies shall then have been raised, and they shall stand before Him in the fulness of their human constitution.

And what pencil can sketch the features of this likeness? We can only speak vaguely about it. Blessed are they who shall wear it, and even they may be unable to describe it; yes, and the tongue of angels may not be stocked with sufficient [descriptive expressions].

There is no doubt, however, that we shall be like Christ in mind. Our knowledge is at present limited and confused. There are murky shadows that float over the intellect, and there are special forms of bias that delude and fascinate the heart. Our conceptions are unworthy of those noble objects about which they are formed; and if a blush

may cover the cheek of the redeemed, it will be excited by the memory of those low and limited views of divine truth and glory that they occasionally cherished on earth. Even when we think of our Father—His love, His power, and His glory; of His household in its occupations; and of His home in its immortal blessedness—our ideas are tainted with the earthliness of those human relationships on which they are based. But we shall rise above the relative into the region of the absolute and pure. Light direct from the throne shall pervade the mind, and, like the mists at sunrise, all shadows shall fade away and disappear: “We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away...For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1Co 13:9-10, 12). The new man, put on by the believer, “is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col 3:10). What lessons of [grandeur] may then be imparted! What large and unanticipated conceptions of the divine nature and works and of the vast and far-reaching relations of the economy of grace! God shall be seen in everything, and everything seen in Him. We shall “have the mind of Christ” (1Co 2:16) and shall find that all that philosophy has expounded and all that the Bible has [revealed] are “childish things,” and as such, are completely superseded. “Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1Co 13:12).

And we shall also be like Him in heart, for our spiritual nature shall be perfected. The last and loftiest attainments of holiness shall be reached. Love shall hold an undivided empire within us. What is foreign to our nature shall be taken out of it, and itself “filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:19). Whatever you [esteem] as holy or admire as good shall be concentrated in the person of the glorified saint. Every grace in Christ’s heart shall have a reflection of itself in the hearts of all His worshiping brethren. There shall be no more conscience of sin; all its forms and all the evils it has brought shall be forever done away. “The glory of God” now seen in the face of His Son Jesus Christ shall then be seen also in the face of all the members of the household. The perfection of Christ shall distinguish every one of them, for they shall be satisfied, when they awake, with His likeness (Psa 17:15). Who would not hope for this, and who would not willingly die to reach it? Such a perfected nature must also enjoy intimate fellowship with His Father and their Father, His God and their God. The children, as they see Him and adore His glory, shall feel forever as one with Him. Nothing shall be a barrier to their communion; for though the person of an angel should pass between them and the throne, it would cast no shad-

ow upon them. Their happiness, too, will be [pure]—no pang can be felt, and no tear can ever fall. No one shall ever say, “I am sick”; and the symbol of mourning shall never be seen on their robe, for the elder Brother “has abolished death” (2Ti 1:10). “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Rev 7:16-17)...

And, lastly, we shall be like Him in physical constitution. The brightness of heaven does not oppress Him, nor shall it dazzle us. Our humanity dies, indeed, and is decomposed; but when He appears, it shall be raised, beautified, and fitted to dwell in a region which “flesh and blood cannot inherit” (1Co 15:50). Man has been made to dwell on earth and on no other planet. If he is to spend a happy eternity in a distant sphere, his physical frame must be prepared for it. If he is to see God and yet live, to serve Him in a world where there is no night and no sleep, to worship Him in company with angels that have not the clog² of an animal³ frame, and like them to adore with continuous anthem and without exhaustion—then, surely, his nature must be changed, for otherwise it would soon be overpowered by such splendors and would die of ecstasy amidst such enjoyments. The glory of heaven would speedily become a delicious agony. But here is the blessed promise: the Lord Jesus “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phi 3:21). Therefore, these bodies shall cease to be fleshly without ceasing to be human bodies, and they shall become “spiritual” bodies—[spiritualized] vehicles for the pure spirit that shall be lodged within them. “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1Co 15:53). And thus, in our entire nature, “we shall be like him”—so like our illustrious prototype, that none can mistake the family relation.

From *Divine Love* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 116-141, www.solid-ground-books.com.

John Eadie (1810-1876): Scottish Secession and United Presbyterian theologian and minister; born in Alva, Stirlingshire, Scotland, UK.



Adoption is a most precious blessing of the covenant of grace.

—*Herman Witsius*

² **clog** – hindrance; anything that slows action or progress.

³ **animal** – fleshly; relating to the physical nature as opposed to the spiritual.

SACRED EVIDENCE OF SONSHIP

Thomas Reade (1776-1841)

HOW rich, how varied are the blessings of redemption! Like the gracious Giver, they are infinite and eternal, reaching from everlasting to everlasting. Fully to know the gifts of grace, we must know the fullness of Him from whom they flow. Surely, gratitude ought to swell our hearts when we contemplate the author of our mercies and the abject worms on whom those mercies are bestowed.

Happy is that heart that can appreciate the love of Jesus and to which the Savior is increasingly precious. Thus to feel is heaven begun, and it forms one of the brightest evidences of adoption into the family of God.

According to the natural order of things, we are first made the children of God, and then we receive the spirit of children. This is in perfect accord with Scripture: “Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26), and “because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6). For “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4-5). Hence, “he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1Jo 5:10), the indwelling Spirit testifying to his spirit, or conscience, that he is a child of God; for thus says John: “Hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1Jo 3:24). Therefore, filial affections towards God as our covenant Father, produced in the soul by the Holy Spirit, constitute the Spirit of adoption and prove us to be His redeemed children.

This delightful feeling of sonship with all its attendant blessedness creates a peace and joy such as a loving child experiences in the society and under the smiles of an affectionate parent. But we must never forget that this state of heart is not the mere effect of contemplating the change that may have passed upon us. When we look into ourselves, we find continual need for the deepest humiliation, even when we can praise God for His distinguishing mercy towards us.

Our peace and joy are the fruits of faith in the blood of Christ, wrought in us through the mighty power of God. We can have peace and joy only through believing. But as we become the children of God

by faith, so true peace in the conscience and joy in the heart can be maintained and increased *only* through an abiding reliance on the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

From this foundation arises a sacred edifice of heavenly graces. “Know ye not,” says the apostle, “know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1Co 6:19-20). All the delightful experiences of true believers are inseparably connected with the witness of the Spirit. For though, for perspicuity’s sake,¹ we may endeavor to speak of them as so many steps ascending to the highest privileges of the gospel, yet they are so blended together that to separate them would be like separating the superstructure of a building from its foundation or disjoining the members of a beautifully formed body.

Every grace of the Spirit has its counterfeit in the hypocrite. Oh, what need we have to pray for wisdom to “try the spirits” (1Jo 4:1). All joy is not the fruit of the Spirit: “The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment” (Job 20:5). All peace is not the peace of God: “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them” (1Th 5:3).

The enemy of souls can sow his tares, which at a distance may appear like true wheat, while, on closer inspection, they are found to be destitute of the precious grain. The renewed mind, on the contrary, unfolds its native excellencies the more minutely it is viewed, just as the insect and the flower spread before us their exquisite forms and beauties in proportion to the power of the lens.

Thus, the more we become acquainted with a real child of God, the more of the divine image we shall discover. Humility, love, and purity will equally spread before us their beauties and prove that the workmanship is of God.

What remains of fallen nature will indeed be uncouth² and forbidding,³ but what is of God will be attractive and delightful. Oh, that my heart may be molded into this lovely image! There is in the blessed Jesus everything to kindle our love to the highest flame. Lord, inflame my whole heart with constant, fervent love to Thee.

Some professors of religion consider every affection short of ecstasy

¹ **for perspicuity’s sake** – for the sake of clarity or clear understanding.

² **uncouth** – unattractive; unpleasant.

³ **forbidding** – repulsive.

as worth nothing. Hence many, it is to be feared, substitute mere animal excitement for joy in the Holy Spirit and thus deceive themselves.

A person may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, have much of the meekness and gentleness of Christ, and yet not be able from some mental cause to exercise that filial confidence towards God in which the Spirit of adoption in a great measure consists, although none can possess the Spirit without bringing forth the fruits of righteousness.

Others, from some peculiar temperament of body, may be prevented from feeling high transports of joy, while, at the same time, they can taste the sweets of inward serenity⁴ and composedness of mind. Others again, from a deep view of their own corruption, cannot or dare not recognize in themselves a holy conformity to God, though they hate sin and truly love the Savior.

Now, shall we say that such characters have not the Spirit's witness because they cannot feel this ecstasy of delight? Must the work of the Spirit be overlooked in the absence of rapturous⁵ feeling? Shall we make those sad whom the Lord has not made sad? Oh, how needful it is for the enjoyment of true comfort to place our experience on the right foundation!

Now if joy, which is the Christian's delightful privilege, be the effect of the Spirit's witness rather than the witness itself, then the humble follower of Jesus, who has the testimony of his conscience that he has [believed in] God for his portion and cleaves wholly to his Savior for righteousness and strength, ought not to despond because he cannot rise to those heights of joy that some favored believers are permitted to attain. He may, however, and he ought, to take courage from this inward witness of the Spirit to his conscience to aspire after so happy a state of mind that conduces so much to the glory of God and to the spiritual growth of his own soul, for "the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh 8:10).

May we not then conclude that, when joy overflows the heart through a lively sense of redeeming grace, it forms a sunshine in the soul; and that when this joy is accompanied with love and confidence and reverence and trust in God, we have the Spirit of adoption in its most genuine exercise? We also perceive that joyful emotions arising from some powerful impression or animal excitement may be [short-lived], as is evident from the stony ground hearer who anon⁶ received

⁴ **serenity** – absence of mental stress or anxiety.

⁵ **rapturous** – experiencing intense pleasure, ecstasy, or delight.

⁶ **anon** – immediately.

the Word with joy but in time of temptation fell away (Mat 13:20-21).

It is to guard against such a delusion as this that we should endeavor to form a solid and Scriptural basis on which to repose our hopes and consolations. Joy may be unhallowed,⁷ but submissive obedience to the will of God cannot be. How important, and yet how determinate, is the declaration of Paul: “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14). Am I led by the Spirit of God? Oh, how much of happiness is contained in the right answer to this question! The Spirit leads the sinner to the foot of the cross. Have I ever reached that place of mercy? The Spirit leads the sinner from the love of sin to the love of holiness. Do I abhor whatever is contrary to the mind of my Redeemer and seek my happiness in the performance of His will?

The Spirit leads the soul from the vanities of the world to the enjoyment of momentous gospel blessings. Have I been graciously withdrawn in heart and affection from an evil world and led into the purifying delights of fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ?

How blessed is the Spirit of adoption, the childlike Spirit that enables us to come to our heavenly Father, neither doubting His power nor distrusting His grace! When we consider our weakness and His strength, our needs and His fullness, we may well feel happy while possessing in all its vigor this Spirit of adoption.

Sickness may invade our frame; poverty may diminish our substance; friends may prove unfaithful; yes, even Satan may harass our minds; and sin, dwelling within us, may lust and rebel; yet with God, the great God, as our reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, we shall rise superior to every grief and loss, and feel and maintain a peace that the world can neither give nor take away.

While in this happy frame of mind, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. But if we are children, then we are heirs—oh, amazing thought, surpassing human intellect to conceive—“heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17)! Heirs of that being whom Abraham styles “the possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:22) and joint-heirs with that Savior Who declared: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (Mat 28:18). Surely, then, with delightful propriety⁸ might the apostle say, “All things are yours...And ye are Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” (1Co 3:21, 23).

⁷ **unhallowed** – unholy; wicked.

⁸ **propriety** – appropriateness; correctness.

Are the children of God, while thus exalted in privileges, exempt from affliction? Ah, no! While here below, they must tread the path of suffering, the path by which the blessed Jesus went to glory; for it is added, “If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17).

Oh, Thou adorable Savior, may I never shrink from bearing Thy cross when called to endure it; if I suffer with Thee, I shall also reign with Thee. But who is sufficient for these things? (2Co 2:16). Of myself, I am perfect weakness, but in Thee there is fullness of strength; and through faith in Thee, I shall assuredly overcome.

Oh, that I may daily possess this sacred evidence of my adoption into Thy family, an evidence that will stand the test of trial and temptation, that will keep me humble in prosperity, patient in affliction, peaceful in death, and joyful through eternity. Impart this blessing for Thine own mercies’ sake, my only helper and deliverer.

From *Christian Retirement: or Spiritual Exercises of the Heart*,
in the public domain.

Thomas Reade (1776-1841): English layman and author; born in Manchester, England, UK.



The sons of God are all led by His Spirit... They are led away from sin, away from self-righteousness, away from the world. This is the road by which the Spirit leads God’s children. Those whom God adopts, He teaches and trains. He shows them their own hearts. He makes them weary of their own ways. He makes them long for inward peace. They are led to Christ. They are led to the Bible. They are led to prayer. They are led to holiness. This is the beaten path along which the Spirit makes them to travel. Those whom God adopts He always sanctifies. He makes sin very bitter to them. He makes holiness very sweet. Settle this down in your heart, and do not let it go. The sons of God are a people led by the Spirit of God.

—*J. C. Ryle*

You ought to feel a sweet joy in the perpetual relationship that is now established between you and God, for Jesus is still your brother. You have been adopted, and God has never cancelled adoption yet. There is such a thing as regeneration, but there is not such a thing as the life then received dying out. If you are born unto God, you are born unto God. The stars may turn to coals, and the sun and moon may become clots of blood; but he that is born of God has a life within him that can never end. He is God’s child, and God’s child he shall be. Therefore, let him walk at large like a child, an heir, a prince of the blood royal, who bears a relationship to the Lord that neither time nor eternity can ever destroy. This

is why Jesus was made of a woman and made under the Law: that

He might give us to enjoy the fullness of the privilege

of adopted sons.—*C. H. Spurgeon*